

WAGNER

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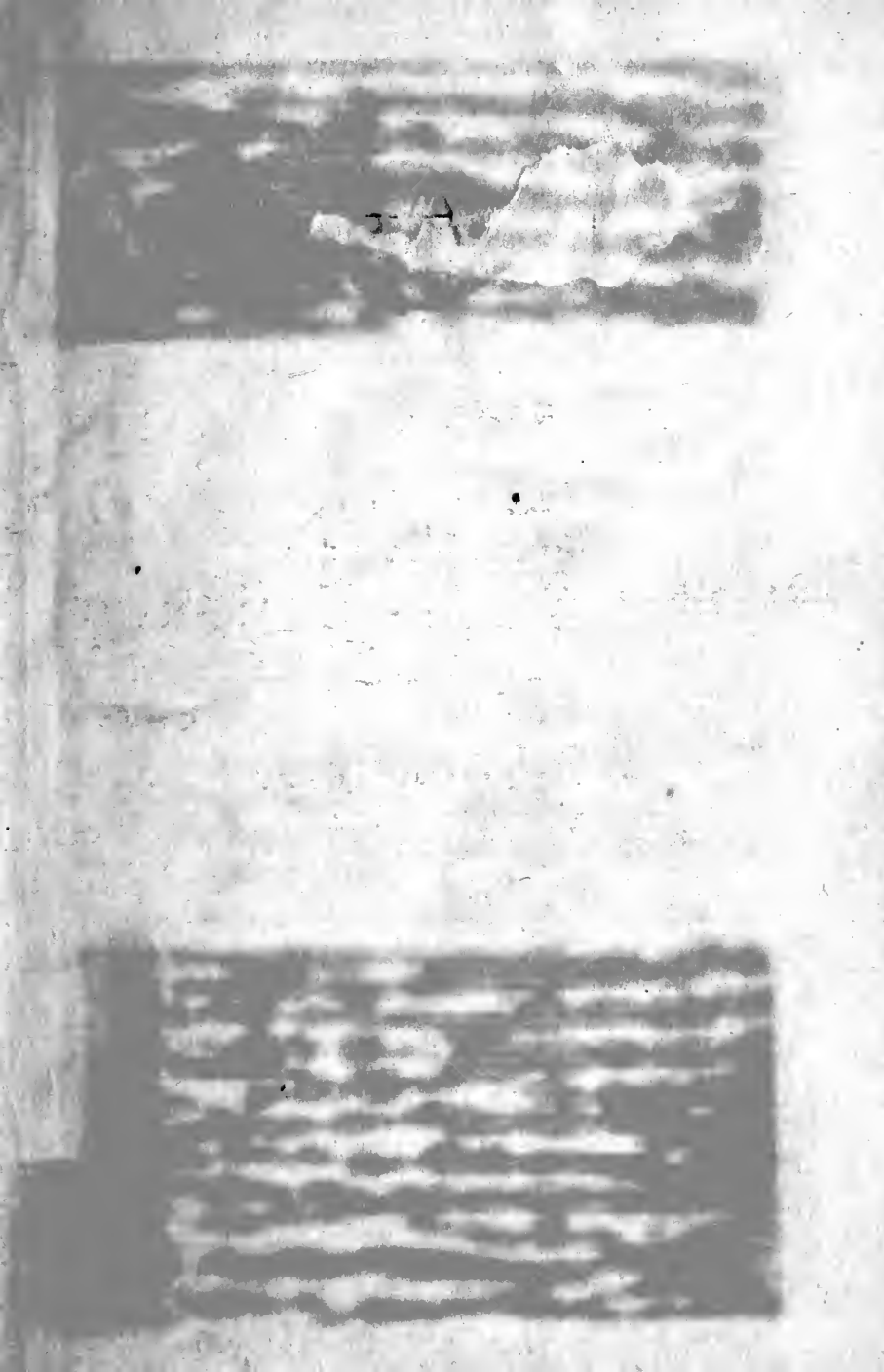


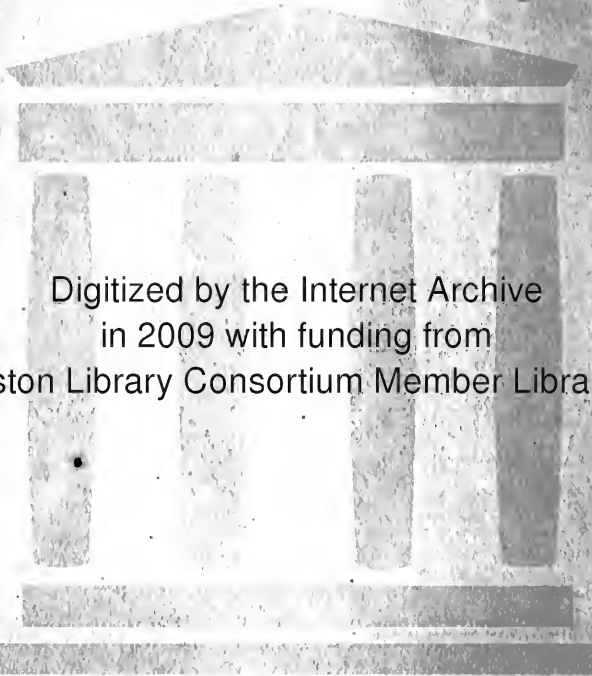
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*THE MUSIC OF THE MASTERS*

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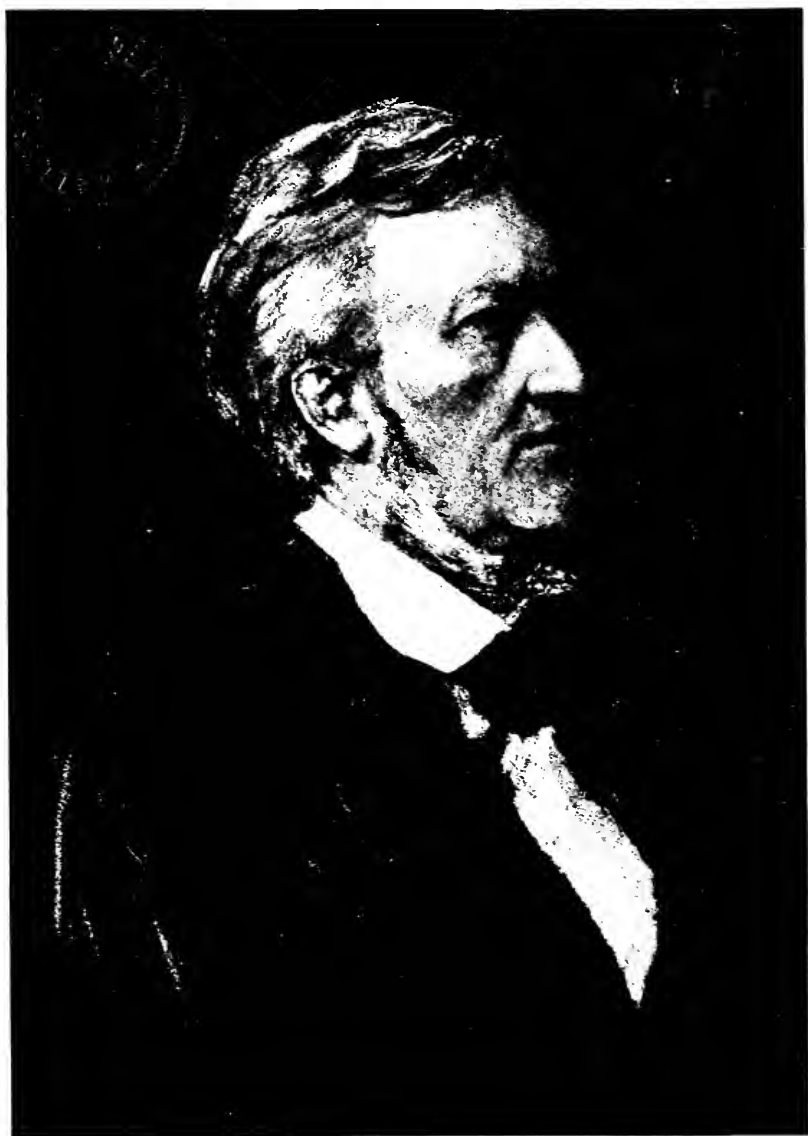
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*EDITED BY WAKELING DRY*







RICHARD WAGNER  
*From a Portrait by Professor Hubert von Herkomer*



*THE MUSIC OF THE MASTERS*

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# WAGNER

BY ERNEST NEWMAN

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD  
LONDON MCMXXII

*First Printed, October 1904*

*Reprinted, August 1912*

*Reprinted, June 1922*

112882

Music Library

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1922

*Printed in Great Britain  
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh*

## PREFACE

IN accordance with the general aim of the series, this book aims in the first place at being useful ; that is, it is intended rather as a guide and a help to the plain man than a full critical study of Wagner. And since we have so little opera in this country, and the plain man hears most of his Wagner in the concert-room, an attempt has been made to render what he hears there more comprehensible to him. In telling the stories of the operas, for example, an eye has been had to the concert-goer who is likely to hear no more than detached fragments from them, which fragments, however, only tell half their story to him if he is ignorant of the opera as a whole. In selecting the musical quotations the same purpose has been kept in view. To give an adequate thematic guide to Wagner would mean an enormous display of musical type ; one commentator, by no means so

extravagant as some of his fellows, discovers no less than 28 motives in *Tristan* alone, 23 in *The Mastersingers*, 81 in *The Ring*, and 24 in *Parsifal*, a total of 156 for these four works, as against the 89 in this volume for the whole of Wagner. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the really essential themes are given here, and that the concert-goer in particular will discover almost all he is likely to meet with.

Wagner's world-theories have been touched upon as lightly as possible; on the other hand, an attempt is made to trace a connection between a great many things in his works and the immediate circumstances of his life.

E. N.

# CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE . . . . .	ix
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	xv
I. WAGNER'S DEVELOPMENT : "THE FAIRIES" AND OTHER EARLY WORKS	i
II. "RIENZI" . . . . .	ii
III. WAGNER'S FURTHER DEVELOPMENT : "THE FLYING DUTCHMAN" . . . . .	20
IV. "TANNHÄUSER" . . . . .	43
V. "LOHENGRIN" . . . . .	65
VI. "THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG" . . . . .	85
VII. "TRISTAN AND ISOLDE" . . . . .	137
VIII. "THE MASTERSINGERS" . . . . .	154
IX. MISCELLANEOUS WORKS . . . . .	170
X. "PARSIFAL" . . . . .	182
XI. BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	201



## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

1813. Born at Leipzig (22nd May).
1830. Overture in B flat performed at Leipzig under H. Dorn.
1831. Wrote Piano Sonata in B flat, and Polonaise in D, for four hands (both published 1832).
- |                           |                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Wrote Fantasia in F sharp | } (never published). |
| minor.                    |                      |
| Overture to Raupach's     |                      |
| <i>King Enzo.</i>         |                      |
| Concert Overture in D     |                      |
| minor.                    |                      |
| Concert Overture in C,    |                      |
| with fugue.               |                      |
1832. Symphony in C major (performed twice, in 1832 and 1833).
- Wrote part of the music to *The Wedding* and some compositions for Goethe's *Faust*.
1833. Wagner at Würzburg.
- Wrote *The Fairies*. (First performed, after Wagner's death, on 29th June 1888, at Munich.)

1834. Wagner at Magdeburg.  
Began a symphony (never finished) in E major.
1835. Wrote a *Columbus Overture* (never published).
1836. Married Minna Planer.  
Wrote *The Novice of Palermo*.  

<i>Rule Britannia Overture.</i> <sup>1</sup>	}	(never published).
<i>Polonia Overture.</i>		
1837. Wagner at Königsberg and Riga.
1838. Sketched *Rienzi*.  
Wrote *Der Tannenbaum*.
1839. Finished first two Acts of *Rienzi*.  
Lived in Paris.  
Began *A Faust Overture* (finished February 1840).  
Wrote four songs : “ Sleep, my Baby.”  
“ Mignonne.”  
“ Expectation.”  
“ The Two Grenadiers.”
1840. Finished *Rienzi*.
1841. Worked at *The Flying Dutchman*.
1842. Wagner at Dresden. First performance of *Rienzi* there, on 20th October.
1843. First performance of *The Flying Dutchman* at Dresden, on 2nd January.  
Finished *Tannhäuser* poem.  
Wrote *The Love-Feast of the Apostles*.

<sup>1</sup> The long-lost score of this has recently been discovered at Leicester.



1844. Wrote the Funeral Music for Interment of  
Weber's remains at Dresden.  
Wrote *The Greeting of the Faithful*.
1845. Sketched the poem of *Lohengrin*.  
First performance of *Tannhäuser* at Dresden,  
on 19th October, under Wagner.
1846. Wrote 3rd Act of *Lohengrin* (September  
1846 to March 1847).
1847. Wrote 1st Act of *Lohengrin* (May and June),  
and 2nd Act (June to August).
1848. Wrote poem of *Siegfried's Death*.
1849. Wagner involved in political troubles. Fled  
to Weimar, thence to Zürich. After  
journey to Paris, settled in Zürich.
1850. First performance of *Lohengrin* at Weimar,  
on 28th August, under Liszt.
1851. Wrote poem of *Young Siegfried*.
1852. Wrote poems of *The Valkyrie* and *The  
Rhinegold*.  
Recast *Young Siegfried* and *Siegfried's Death*.
1853. Worked at the music of *The Rhinegold*.  
Wrote Album Sonata in E flat major
1854. Finished *The Rhinegold* (January).  
Completed the scoring in May.  
In June, began composition of *The Val-  
kyrie*.
1855. Wagner in London, then in Zürich again.  
Re-wrote *A Faust Overture*.  
Worked at *The Valkyrie*.
1856. Finished scoring *The Valkyrie* (April).  
Worked at *Siegfried*.

1857. Finished 1st Act and part of 2nd Act of *Siegfried*.

1857-58. Engaged on *Tristan and Isolde*.

Wrote five songs :—1. "The Angel."

2. "Be Still."

3. "In the Hothouse."

4. "Grief."

5. "Dreams."

1859. Finished *Tristan* (August).

1860. Wrote *Albumblatt* in A flat major.

1861. Stormy reception of *Tannhäuser* in Paris (13th March).

Wrote poem of *The Mastersingers*.

1862. Began music of *The Mastersingers*.

1864. Summoned to Munich by King Ludwig of Bavaria.

Wrote the *Huldigungsmarsch*.

1865. Returned to Switzerland (December).

First performance of *Tristan* at Munich on 10th June, under Von Bülow.

1866. Death of Minna Wagner.

1867. Finished music of *The Mastersingers*.

1868. First performance of *The Mastersingers* at Munich, on 21st June, under Von Bülow.

1869. Finished music of *Siegfried*.

Began composition of *The Dusk of the Gods*.

First performance of *The Rhinegold* at Munich, on 22nd September, under Wüllner.

His son Siegfried born (6th June).

1870. First performance of *The Valkyrie* at Munich,  
on 26th June, under Wüllner.  
Married Cosima von Bülow (25th August).  
Finished 1st and 2nd Acts of *The Dusk of  
the Gods*.  
Wrote the *Siegfried Idyll*.
1871. Finished scoring of *Siegfried*.  
Wrote the *Kaisermarsch*.
1872. Foundation-stone of Bayreuth theatre laid  
(22nd May).  
Finished 3rd Act of *The Dusk of the Gods*.
1874. Finished scoring of *The Dusk of the Gods*.
1875. Wrote *Albumblatt* in E flat major.
1876. First performance of *The Ring of the Nibe-  
lung* at Bayreuth (August 13th-17th)  
under Richter.  
Wrote *American Centennial March*.
1877. Finished poem of *Parsifal* (February).  
Began the music (Autumn).  
Wagner in London.
1880. Wagner in Italy.
1882. Finished *Parsifal* (January).  
First performance of *Parsifal*, at Bayreuth,  
on 26th July, under Levi.
1883. Died at Venice (13th February).





## INTRODUCTION

THE present volume does not undertake to present to the reader the whole Wagner, but the essential Wagner. There is a double reason for this. In the first place, the size of the book limits the field of treatment; in the second place, the whole Wagner, though he is an interesting psychological problem to those who have the leisure and the desire to study a great artist all through, in his weakness as well as his strength, is of no particular moment to the plain man whose interest is primarily in Wagner as a musical dramatist. Wagner the sociologist, Wagner the historian, Wagner the economist, Wagner the philosopher, almost all might be swept away without the world losing very much. It is true that, since every man's mind is all of a piece—"the whole man thinks," as George Henry Lewes said—Wagner would not have been the same, even in his music, had his

brain not flung out so many non-musical tentacles to seize upon life and the world. But it is also true that if his passionate interest in other things fed his emotions, and gave a nobler ring, a warmer colour, and a wider sweep to his art, his practical discussions of these other things mostly show the hand of the amateur,—except in matters of musical æsthetic, where his tread is at times singularly daring and singularly sure. A few enthusiasts still go on proclaiming that Wagner was a great thinker, but their number diminishes day by day; and without any disrespect to them, one may say that their tributes to the excellence of Wagner's thought would be more convincing were their own reputation as scientific thinkers a little more surely established. They themselves would resent the intrusion of a mere economist or sociologist into the charmed inner circle of music; they cannot, then, object to the remark that the trained historian smiles at Wagner's metaphysical way of writing history, the economist sniffs at his economics, the sociologist ignores his sociology, and the philosopher takes him even less seriously than he does the overrated Schopenhauer on whom Wagner founded. If the opinion

of the expert as against the amateur is to count for anything in music, it must count for just as much in other things ; and the polite way in which authorities in their own departments disregard Wagner's well-meant offers of assistance is a significant commentary on their worth.

Wagner as a thinker, in short, is receding more and more from the public eye, while for Wagner as a musician our admiration is probably greater than ever. The present volume, then, will discuss him simply in that capacity in which he most interests the general public—as a musician and a dramatist.<sup>1</sup> We will put aside, too, nearly all the metaphysical and other talk under which, following the bad example of Wagner himself, the more solemn of his partisans have done their best to submerge his music. The principle we will go upon is this : that a work of art has to stand or fall by the amount of art there is in it, irrespective of what social or moral lesson can be drawn from it. You will not save a piece of inferior art by tacking a superior moral to

<sup>1</sup> For an attempt to study Wagner all round, in his non-musical as well as his musical work, perhaps I may be allowed to refer the reader to my *Study of Wagner* (Bertram Dobell, 1899).

it; nor—which is still more important—will you make a piece of good art any better or weightier by finding in it the most admirable moral or social lessons. Unfortunately the older Wagnerians could not see this. They must needs indulge in the most primitive and most foolish of all kinds of art criticism,—that which tries to impress a work of art into the service of some pet theory, and so makes of it merely a tract in verse, in line and colour, or in tones.

Wagner himself set them the bad example. Of Ortrud, for instance, he thus wrote to Liszt: “Ortrud is a woman who does not know love. . . . Politics are her essence. The political *man* is repulsive; the political *woman* is horrible, and it is this horror I had to represent. There is a kind of love in this woman, the love of the past, of dead generations, the terribly insane love of ancestral pride, which finds its expression in the hatred of everything living, actually existing.” Well, who cares two straws for the relation of Ortrud to politics, or for Wagner’s crude philosophising about the political man and the political woman? Ortrud has to convince us of her *dramatic* existence: is she artistically alive, is she



artistically real, is all we want to know ; we do *not* want a personified abstraction on the stage. Nor does it help us to be told that "Elsa is the unconscious, the undeliberate, into which Lohengrin's conscious, deliberate being yearns to be redeemed ; but this yearning, again, is itself the unconscious, undeliberate necessity in Lohengrin, whereby he feels himself akin to Elsa's being," or that—to pass from Wagner to Wagner's commentators—"Mime is the craft which finds its best soil in the Church, impressing every one in early youth, before judgment is ripe, with the belief that it is a spiritual father and mother," or that Wotan is "the type of Creed, and an incarnation of Will," or that the love of Tristan and Isolde "discloses to them the fact that its true domain is not *life*, the daylight—or, to borrow the formulas of Schopenhauer, the world of phenomena, of sensible appearances, the world of plurality where the Will appears split up into innumerable individualities—but rather *death*, the *night*, or in philosophical language, the domain of the absolute, the unconscious, the one."

All these fearful and wonderful things may be quite true, but they really do not

matter, any more than it matters whether Othello smothering Desdemona may or may not be regarded as a symbol of the black night engulfing the fair day. We laugh at this kind of Shakespeare interpretation when we meet with it in Gervinus or Victor Hugo ; and kindly laughter is perhaps the best criticism upon the too solemn Wagner interpreter. I take it that the average intelligent man who hears the great duet in *Tristan* is interested in Tristan and Isolde only as human beings, not as pegs on which some pedant or other can hang second-hand suits of metaphysics.

In considering Wagner's music-dramas, then, we shall confine ourselves to the consideration of them as music and as dramas, dabbling no more in metaphysics than is absolutely necessary to show why Wagner makes a certain character do this or say that. "I require nothing from the public," Wagner wrote to Liszt in a momentary lapse from metaphysics into sanity, "but healthy senses and a human heart." Let us take him at his word.

# THE MUSIC OF THE MASTERS

## CHAPTER I

### WAGNER'S DEVELOPMENT : "THE FAIRIES" AND OTHER EARLY WORKS

WE are so used to thinking of Wagner as a flaming revolutionist in music and all other things,—a kind of primal self-willed force that broke through all fetters in order to assert itself and itself only—that we are apt to lose sight of the fact that few men have been, in many respects, so impressionable as he, so easily turned this way or that by their associates or by the particular authors they happened to be reading. In the present volume we are not concerned with his political and other non-æsthetic theories, from which this proposition might be easily proved—he flies from Bakunin to Feuerbach, for example, from Feuerbach to Schopenhauer, from Schopenhauer to Comte

Gobineau, warming himself for a moment at each one's fire; even in the interpretation of the inner meaning of his own works he changes with the changing years. Thus in 1851 he tells us that *Tannhäuser* embodies a yearning for "release from the present," and "absorption into an element of endless love, a love denied to earth and reachable through the gates of Death alone."<sup>1</sup> Five years later, when he has given himself up body and soul to Schopenhauer, he discovers that his "reason" had quite misunderstood what his "intuition" had been about in *Tannhäuser*, and that the real philosophy of that work "is to be sought in the sublime tragedy of renunciation, the negation of the will, which here appears as necessary and inevitable, and alone capable of working redemption;"<sup>2</sup> the real reason of this *volte-face* being that, as M. Lichtenberger points out,<sup>3</sup> in the first epoch Wagner was a revolutionary and an optimist under the spell of Feuerbach, while in the second he was a pessimist with Schopenhauer.

<sup>1</sup> *Prose Works*, i. 323.

<sup>2</sup> See his letter to Roeckel of 23rd August, 1856.

<sup>3</sup> Wagner, *Poète et Penseur*, pp. 109-116.

No great artist was ever so enormously affected in his views of the cosmos by the circumstances of his own life. The popular notion of him as a demigod of adamantine artistic will is a mere myth; from his earliest to his later years he was extraordinarily susceptible to every variation in the atmosphere around him; and at first he cannot move a step on his own account,—he has to follow whither some one else leads him. When, as a boy, he learns Greek, he must needs write Greek dramas. When he learns something of Shakespeare, he writes a huge drama, “a compound of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*.” He hears Beethoven’s music to *Egmont*, and of course must then have music for *his* play. He makes Mozart’s acquaintance and commits a pianoforte sonata. Having seen Beethoven in another aspect, he writes a concert overture in C major, with fugue, “on the model of Beethoven, whom now I understood somewhat better.” A performance of the “Pastoral” symphony sets him to work on a pastoral play, founded on Goethe’s *Lovers’ Fancies*. Next he turns to opera-writing; and the romantic opera of Weber and Marschner being the rage of the day, he conceives *The Fairies*. He becomes

conductor at Magdeburg; here the light operas he produces turn his creative faculties, as he admits, in their direction, and the result is *The Novice of Palermo* (*Das Liebesverbot*). At the same time, in his practical life he follows the lead of the young bloods who preach anarchy and free-love and generally paint the town red. He gives up abstract mysticism and becomes a materialist; he dethrones Beethoven, and in his place instals the French and the Italians—Auber, Verdi, and Bellini. Then he turns his eyes to Paris, and *Rienzi* is the result. When he goes to the Grand Opera, the thought of being performed there gives him exquisitely voluptuous sensations; he was, as he says, in “an almost artificial state of nervous exaltation.” But Paris will not have him; whereupon he discovers the hollowness of the Parisian opera-ideal. He now has to look to Germany for performances; so he crosses the Rhine, and “with hot tears in my eyes, I, poor artist, swore eternal fidelity to my German fatherland.” Indeed, as soon as *Rienzi* had been accepted for Dresden, “an ardent, yearning patriotism woke within me, such as I had never dreamt before.” In Paris he had heard Beethoven’s Ninth

Symphony; this stimulated him to write his own *Faust Overture*. As a boy, and again as a man, he was a fervent Weber worshipper; but in 1834 he could write madly against *Euryanthe*, he being then under other influences. In 1852 he makes the acquaintance of Hafiz, who, of course, instantly becomes "the greatest of all poets." As he grew older the strain of self-assertiveness in him, particularly in musical matters, became stronger, and we find him marking out one or two distinct paths for himself and keeping to them consistently; but even to the end he was most susceptible to all the changing intellectual currents that swept around him, and given to deducing a world-philosophy from the condition of his own nervous system at the moment. When he found that a vegetarian diet suited him better than a flesh one, he proposed that the northern races should migrate from their present habitat into other parts of the world, where the climate would permit them to be pure vegetarians!

One notes all this, not by way of disparagement, but simply as a prime factor in his psychology; Shakespeare was partly of the same intellectual build, needing to

catch fire from other men's culture, needing the impact of another brain upon his own before his imagination could be stimulated to its best flight.<sup>1</sup> It is this mental constitution that accounts for Wagner doing so little really original work in his earlier days. Like Gluck, he grew slowly, half-consciously, half-unconsciously assimilating what was good and rejecting what was bad in the practice of other men, and only discovering himself after many experiments along the wrong line.

He began with the extravagant morbidity of fancy common to the young men of that time. His first libretto—*The Wedding*—dealt with a mad lover who climbs through the window into the bedroom of his friend's bride, who is awaiting her bridegroom; the lady struggles with the lunatic and throws him out of the window into the courtyard, where of course he dies. At the funeral, the bride shrieks and falls lifeless on the corpse. Like Heine, Wagner had to pass through a "raw head and bloody bones" epoch. The music to *The Wedding* was hardly begun before he had the sense to destroy the libretto. His

<sup>1</sup> See this admirably brought out in Mr. John M. Robertson's *Montaigne and Shakespeare*.



next opera, *The Fairies*, had a better fate. He wrote it at Würzburg, in 1833, but it did not receive its first performance until 29th June 1888, some five years after his death, when it was given at Munich. As the overture to *The Fairies* is the only specimen of Wagner's early work which the concert-goer is likely to hear, a summary of the opera may be useful. The story is taken from Gozzi. A fairy desires to renounce immortality for the sake of a human lover, but can only become a mortal upon condition that her lover shall not reject her, no matter into what repulsive form she may metamorphose herself. He fails in the test, and the fairy has to suffer. In Gozzi's tale she is changed into a snake, which the lover kisses, thus restoring her to her proper form. Wagner makes the fairy change into a stone, and the restoration to life is effected by a passionate song of the lover. The fairy does not go off to the land of mortals with him, but by the grace of the king of the fairies the lover is admitted into fairyland, together with his wife.

In the Overture there is something of Weber's influence, but here and there the later Wagner peeps out. In the following

phrase, for example (taken from the fairy's aria in the second Act)—

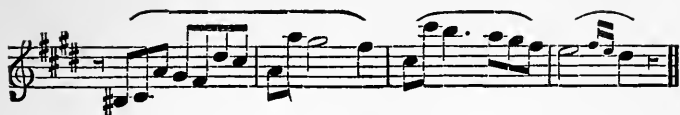


there is a suggestion of the *Faust Overture* ; while in this—



we come very close to a well-known phrase in Elisabeth's Address in *Tannhäuser*. Some marked peculiarities of his early style are also to be detected in this Overture. There is the germ of that separation of wood-wind and strings that is so strong a factor in the colouring of *Tannhäuser*. We see, too, that tendency to bring in his strong accent always at certain regular intervals, that is especially noticeable in *Rienzi* and *The Flying Dutchman*, and that was only gradually weeded out of his style. It is noticeable in the passage just quoted (No. 2), where the accent occurs on the first note of each bar ; and again in this—





where the accents in bars 2, 3, and 4 are exactly duplicated in bars 6, 7, and 8. (The phrase, it will be observed, is a variant of No. 1. It forms the first subject of the Overture. The second subject—



is given to the wood-wind both at its first appearance and on its recurrence). Add to these remarks that the Overture to *The Fairies* shows how even at that time Wagner knew how to build up a big climax, and we have probably said all that needs to be said about it.

His next youthful work, *The Novice of Palermo* (or *The Love-Veto*), was adapted from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*. It was Shakespeare's play seen through the eyes of an excitable and very sensuous young man, who—as he himself admitted later—missed the spiritual and saw only the erotic motivation of the work. It is clear from sundry hints in his prose writings

that Wagner was hardly a model of propriety at this time; and in *The Novice of Palermo* he gave himself up to the very congenial task of "glorifying free and frank physicalism," and having a fling at what he called "Puritan hypocrisy." His opera had only one performance, and is never likely to be revived.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For details of the plot, the reader may turn to *A Communication to My Friends*, in *Prose Works*, i. 294 ff. The music to the Finale of Act I. is given in Chamberlain's *Richard Wagner*. To the unworshipping and un hypnotised eye it presents no remarkable feature; the rhythmic step in particular is monotonous and commonplace, as in so much of Wagner's early music.

## CHAPTER II

### “ RIENZI ”

*Rienzi* is the only specimen of Wagner's early operatic work that we possess intact, and from this it can be seen how slow his mental growth really was. There is little in the opera that suggests the Wagner we now know. The plot is drawn from Bulwer Lytton's *Rienzi*. In the first Act we are shown a Roman street at night: in the background is the church of St. John Lateran; in the foreground, to the right, is the house of Rienzi. An attempt is made by Orsini and other patricians to abduct Rienzi's sister, Irene. While this is going on, the Colonnas, another patrician family, enter and attack their enemies the Orsinis. Irene is saved by Colonna's son, Adriano. The people join in the disturbance, which is at length ended by the appearance of Rienzi. The unappeased patricians go outside the city to conclude their combat. Cardinal Raimondo asks Rienzi when the time will

come to give the finishing blow to these turbulent nobles, who are always disturbing the peace of Rome ; Rienzi tells him and the populace to wait until the trumpet has sounded a long call. He induces Adriano to throw in his lot with the popular cause, and the people having already departed, he too quits the stage, leaving Adriano and Irene to a love-scene, at the end of which the trumpet sound agreed upon is heard. In the Finale the people rush joyfully on the stage ; day dawns, and a solemn service is heard inside the church of St. John ; Rienzi emerges and is greeted enthusiastically by the people, the title of whose Tribune he consents to accept.

The second Act opens in the Capitol. Messengers of peace enter, singing of the happiness that is to descend upon Rome now the people's cause has triumphed. The nobles humble themselves before Rienzi ; but when he leaves them they plot to kill him, Orsini being the chosen instrument. The plot is overheard by Adriano, who tells Rienzi of it. Foreign ambassadors enter, for whose benefit there is given a pantomime—representing the story of Lucretia—and a combat of ancient Roman gladiators and knights ; the games end with the

appearance of the Goddess of Peace, followed by some festive dances. Orsini stabs Rienzi, but the dagger strikes on a breast-plate beneath the Tribune's coat. The patricians are now condemned to death, but on the intercession of Adriano and Irene are again pardoned, and once more take an oath of loyalty.

This oath is broken in the third Act. There is a tumultuous scene in a public square in Rome; this time Rienzi is inflexible, and in the fighting many nobles are killed, including old Colonna. When Adriano sees his father's body he vows vengeance on Rienzi.

In the fourth Act the tide begins to turn against Rienzi. One of the senators, Baroncelli, finds fault with him for pardoning the nobles, alleging that his real reason for doing so was the wish to become one of them by marrying his sister to Adriano. The latter, prompted by his desire for revenge, confirms the accusation. Rienzi goes on his way unmoved, however—Adriano being prevented from killing him by the arrival of Irene—till he reaches the church; whereupon the doors fly open, and the Cardinal appears and excommunicates him, the nobles having made common cause

with the Church. Irene, resisting Adriano's appeal, elects to stay with her brother.

The opening scene of the fifth Act shows Rienzi alone in a hall in the Capitol. He is praying that his work in Rome may not be fruitless. Irene appears, and refuses to leave him to seek her own safety; she also turns a deaf ear to Adriano, who enters hurriedly and implores her to fly with him. The last scene is the exterior of the Capitol. The people execrate Rienzi and set fire to the building. Rienzi and Irene are seen, through the flames, embracing each other on a balcony, and Adriano, rushing to Irene, perishes with them. The Capitol crashes to the ground; and the opera ends with the nobles, their powerful enemy being put out of the way, once more attacking the people who have been gullible enough to trust them.

Wagner frankly admitted, in later years, that in writing the libretto of *Rienzi* he had little idea beyond being "effective" in the conventional grand-opera style; indeed, he wanted to do something more than usually imposing and extravagant, though he is also careful to say that he really did feel the theme deeply. But to the candid eye and ear there is



very little of enduring worth either in the music or the drama. Mr. H. T. Finck is of opinion that “the effectiveness of the libretto betrays the genuine dramatist—the greatest, from a theatrical point of view, that Germany has ever produced.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately there is a good deal more of the theatric than the dramatic in *Rienzi*; as a drama, indeed, it hardly calls for serious criticism. The action is hurried and piled up at preposterous speed; there is little subtlety of character drawing, except here and there in *Rienzi* himself; the characters go through all kinds of radical psychological revulsions in the twinkling of an eye; huge political and social developments are disposed of with a turn of the wrist. The whole structure is operatic—that is, scene follows scene, chorus follows solo, solo follows duet, for the merely musical and theatrical effect; it takes the populace much less time to kill the nobles and settle the fate of Rome than it does to come down to the footlights and sing

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Chamberlain goes the whole Wagnerian hog, of course. “Wagner here . . . has given us a real lesson in history. . . . The prayer at the beginning of the fifth Act of *Rienzi* surely tells us more about the great man than ten volumes of documentary research” (pp. 250, 251).

about it. We notice, too, the first signs of that crude theatricalism that mars some of Wagner's later works. We cannot discuss here his theory as to the importance of appealing to the eye in drama as well as to the ear. To a certain extent he is right, but his own taste in these matters was sometimes rather puerile, and he took very seriously a number of stage presentations that only amuse the unduped mind—the pantomime dragon in *Siegfried* for example. In *Rienzi* we have feeble appeals to a primitive theatrical sense in the gladiatorial combats and games, and in the raw symbolism of the Goddess of Peace appearing—“followed by maidens, some in ancient Roman attire and some in that of the Middle Ages”—and reconciling the ancient and the modern Romans, a process indicated by “the ancient Roman maidens exchanging their ornaments with those of the Middle Ages.” All this kind of thing is very crude, and “betrays” anything but “the genuine dramatist.” Genuine dramatists see life through other eyes than these; they indeed reach the spectator through a visual representation, but they do not confuse the essentially dramatic with what is “effective” in the merely

theatrical sense.<sup>1</sup> It still may be quite true that the libretto of *Rienzi* is superior to those of nine-tenths of the operas of that time; but that is damning it with very faint praise indeed. When the claim is made for it that it “ betrays the genuine dramatist ” we compare it, not with imbecile operas, but with genuine dramas—a comparison, of course, which it can hardly sustain.

As for the music, it must be said that its interest is mainly historical, though it

<sup>1</sup> Wagner suffered all his life from delusions as to the didactic value of some of his theatrical exhibitions. He once spoke of the annoyance caused him at those theatres where the pantomime was omitted from *Rienzi* and a ballet put in its place, thus giving the spectators “ an ordinary operatic spectacle ” instead of the “ nobler intentions ” he had in view. He could not see that, however “ noble ” the intention might be to show the ancient and modern Romans being “ reconciled ” to each other, a stage representation was not the proper medium for it. Allegorical painting is bad enough, but an allegorical theatre is a tiresome abortion. It was the same half-baked dramatic sense that made him fancy Siegfried and Wotan and Brynhilde and the rest of them “ represented ” this, that, or the other moral quality. Dramatic and fictive characters should “ represent ” simply human beings. The claim of King Lear, and Madame Bovary, and Don Quixote, and Figaro to be considered artistically alive is not that they represent any social force or political movement, but are clearly seen and veraciously conceived specimens of the humanity we know, drawn in the round and to the life.

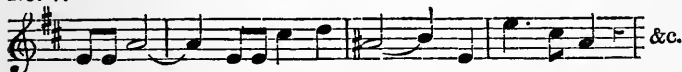


No. 6.



(Previously to this the theme of Rienzi's prayer has been rather vulgarised by being repeated in the more rapid *tempo* of this section.) Next comes the melody sung by Irene, Adriano, and the others in the Finale of the second Act, where they acclaim Rienzi as the bestower of peace, after he has pardoned the nobles—

No. 7.



These materials are now worked up with much energy and plenty of orchestral colour, especially in the repetition of No. 7, where all the percussion instruments join in vociferously, in a knockabout kind of way. Towards the end, the *Sancto spirito* melody emerges in an extended and modified form. The Overture is not at all a thing to be despised, in spite of its occasional touches of banality. It has a fire and strength that few Overtures of that time can show.

## CHAPTER III

### WAGNER'S FURTHER DEVELOPMENT : " THE FLYING DUTCHMAN "

A FEW words of explanation are necessary in order to understand the state of Wagner's mind during the composition of his next three operas—*The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. It is tolerably clear from his prose works and his letters that he was a bit of a sensualist as a young man, and that every now and then his excitable nervous nature had a horrified recoil from the pursuit of physical pleasure. Disgust with the world in these moments of revolution was strengthened by disgust coming from two other sources — his constant pecuniary embarrassment and the almost universal failure of the public to grasp his more serious intentions. No understanding of Wagner is possible unless we keep clearly before us the actual circumstances of the man from moment to moment. An enormous egoist—one uses the term, of course,

in a purely psychological sense, without any moral pose—an enormous egoist, living a life of constant physical and mental excitement, possessed with the one idea of communicating himself fully to the world, he always imagined his own cause to be that of the human race as a whole. If *he* does not get proper appreciation, it is because modern society is loveless; if the present generation of opera-goers cannot understand *him*, a new brood of them must be hatched; and since their bad art is due to the badness of their civilisation, a new civilisation must be achieved through revolution;<sup>1</sup> *he* being a musician before everything else, the only true kind of drama is musical drama; *he* having an imperfect sense of poetry apart from music, non-musical poetry is an error; *he* being lacking in the peculiar feeling painters have for paintings and sculptors for sculpture, these arts are quite minor affairs; *he* being able only imperfectly to realise dramatic psychology without a direct stage

<sup>1</sup> There is little doubt that he really believed in 1848 in a social regeneration that was coming almost at once. The cool anarchist Bakunin said of him "I recognised him at once for a visionary." Even in 1851, as Mr. Ashton Ellis notes, he was thinking of "that ideal condition of society which he still considered realisable in the near future" (*Prose Works*, i. 366, note).

presentation before his eyes, this "physical show" becomes the only path through which "the Feeling" can really be approached. It never occurred to him that what was necessary and inevitable in *his* psychology was not therefore necessary and inevitable in the psychology of the human race as a whole.

We see him at this time gradually becoming more and more conscious both of his extraordinary artistic powers, and of his comparative isolation in life—the latter owing to the world being unable to understand and sympathise with the novelty of his views. In one of these revolts against the blindness of society he conceives *Rienzi*, which is "a salutary distraction" from his ignoble cares. *Rienzi*, he tells us—the man of great thoughts and warm feelings, surrounded by a coarse and vulgar society—set up passionate vibrations of sympathy within him, because he felt he too was a *Rienzi*. Wherever we turn during the next few years, we find in Wagner's operas just Wagner himself; *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and *The Ring of the Nibelung* all spring from the one fountain—dissatisfaction with his own life or that of the world, and longing for



more love, now for himself, now for his art.

In Dresden, as he tells us, the improvement in his finances, the society of some loving friends, and the goodwill of the public, stilled the pangs of his desire. He lost sight for a time of his ideal, and entered upon "a more or less impatient quest for pleasure." Then came another swing-back of the pendulum. His official duties at the opera-house became irksome to him. *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser* were failures, and he was "quite unmanned" by the "utter loneliness" in which he now found himself. So once more he stopped the "quest for pleasure" and saw nothing but lovelessness in the world. In *Tannhäuser* he had, as he says, tried to escape from the world of mad sensuousness to "the unknown land of pure and chaste virginity," a land for which he had no great liking, presumably, in his more exuberant moments. It was just the recoil from the boudoir to the monastery that twenty thousand men in the street take at frequent intervals in their lives. Now he felt the need of more sympathy and love; so there came *Lohengrin*—yet another symbol of Wagner himself. Here, once more, *his* problem became

for him the world's problem. In Lohengrin, he saw "*the type of the only absolute tragedy, in fine, of the tragic element of modern life.*" After this, he made another attempt to express in a clear dramatic formula his notion of the antithesis between what he thought the rotten, conventional, sophisticated society around him and the truly free, receptive human being. This notion found shape in Siegfried, the "real" man, the free working of whose muscles and beating of whose pulses know no constraint—"the type of the true *human being.*"

The more closely we look into the matter, the more evident does it become that in each successive work Wagner sang his own joys and sorrows, his own needs and desires of that particular moment, identifying the world's need, the world's ideal, with his own. Let us now add to this trait the further passion for making æsthetic generalisations from his own artistic nature, and we have the key to his psychology, enabling us to grasp the Wagner who, from *Rienzi* to *The Ring of the Nibelung*, was becoming more and more the peculiar, the unique, being whom the world now knows. In his æsthetic theory there were about equal parts of truth and error. The old

opera clearly would not do ; at its best it was imperfect, at its worst it was an abortion. It was a bad blend of two elements that would only mix properly in certain proportions—which proportions no opera-writer had yet succeeded in finding. Poetry *quâ* poetry, music *quâ* music, were not needed in this combination of the two arts. The former limited the emotional expansion of music, the latter ran riot when it lost the sure hand, at once guiding and restraining, of music. The first thing necessary was the conception of a subject *musical in essence*—that is, capable of appealing directly to feeling. For this Wagner thought the best stuff was the myth, which worked in broad, simple, human outlines, avoiding the tiresome and cumbrous machinery of incident necessary to the historical drama. The few salient scenes of the myth allowed a copious outpouring of musical emotion over them. This freedom and ease of poetic texture permitted a similar ease and freedom in the musical working—the old set forms of aria, duet, chorus, and so on, were unnecessary ; the musical organism could “ spring self-bidden ” from “ the very nature of the scene.” Each chief mood of the drama should have its

distinct and definite musical theme, which should reappear throughout the drama wherever, in its original or in a modified form, it could bring home to the hearer the emotional significance of a scene or a sentiment. Absolute music—music existing for its own sake, a purely pleasing combination and succession of sounds having no root in, no reference to, anything outside itself—could have no place in genuine music-drama. The music is not the end in itself, but the sensuous medium through which we attain the end—*i.e.*, the drama; so that what has to move the hearer is not “the melodic Expression, *per se*,” but “the Emotion expressed.” On the other side, what poetry lost, for the purpose of the new drama, in its own melody, its own sensuous beauty, was to be supplied in richer form by the resources—particularly harmonic—of music. Poetry in music-drama was further to receive a new rhythmic endowment in place of its old one; and terminal rhyme was to go, alliteration being substituted for it.

Such, in the briefest of outlines, was the æsthetic theory that Wagner worked out—or at all events put on paper—during 1849 and 1850. His stupid enemies foolishly

charged him with first inventing the theory and then writing operas in illustration of it. That, of course, is crude psychologising. As Wagner himself says, the theory was no piece of cold logical induction; it was in him, at the root of all his artistic intuitions, and only gradually worked itself up from the unconscious to the conscious planes of his being, at which latter stage he could see it objectively and arrange it in demonstrative form. The great bulk of it is admirably true; but the whole Wagner went into the theory, and the whole Wagner, it needs to be pointed out, was a being of somewhat abnormal structure. He argued that the musical drama was *the* drama; he saw no limitations in it, but plenty of limitations in every other form of art. Now there is abundant evidence, in his letters and his prose works, that he was insensitive, in quite an extraordinary degree, to the charms and the beauties of the other arts. He could not, that is, see them as other men see them, or get from them the pleasure that other men experience.<sup>1</sup> He was right

<sup>1</sup> This could be amply proved did space permit. Here I can mention one or two points only. Modern art was for him "mutilated"; its error was in passing "from direct representation into indirect representation, from tragedy

in aiming at what he called a "unitarian Form," one in which the poetry gave the requisite coherence to the music and the music gave the requisite "emotionalisation" to the poetry, neither having a *raison d'être* without the other. He was wrong in supposing that musical drama could "unify" all the arts, or that any such combination of them could satisfy the distinctive æsthetic cravings to

into the so-called "plastic art." This latter "must cease entirely in the future"; to painting and sculpture, he went on, "I deny a life in the future" (Letter to Uhlig of 12th January 1850). "The egoistically severed humanistic arts" could only be "redeemed" in the "collective art-work of the future" (see *The Art Work of the Future*, *passim*). The watchword he gave his school was "ever to raise, strengthen, and develop music *where it is developing itself in the direction of poetical art*; and where this is not the case, to point out the mistake" (Letter to Uhlig, 15th February 1852). Plastic art "has fallen into utter ruin" (*Religion and Art* [1880], in *Prose Works*, vi. 222). "Let *v* ; finally denote the measure of poetic worth as follows. . . . What is not worth being sung, neither is it worth the poet's pain of telling" (*Opera and Drama*, in *Prose Works*, ii. 355). "With the disappearance of the historico-poetical subject, there must also necessarily vanish, in the future, the spoken form of play" (*A Communication to My Friends*, in *Prose Works*, i. 361). For a fuller discussion of this important question, so cardinal to the psychology of Wagner, I may refer the reader to my *Study of Wagner*. (See the index to that work, under headings, "Wagner and the Non-dramatic Arts," "Wagner and the Theatre," and "Wagner and the Reunion of the Arts.")

which each ministers, or that musical drama covered the whole of life so completely that poetical drama was superfluous. In his æsthetics, as in his philosophy and his sociology, he was simply generalising from his own curious temperament.

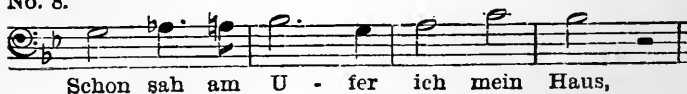
The Wagner sketched here—the Wagner fully conscious of himself, and working at the height of his musical powers—does not really emerge into view until we come to *The Ring of the Nibelung*. But this is the plane of thought up to which he was being drawn by his intuitions from the time when he took *The Flying Dutchman* in hand ; and to have the completed picture of the artist before us now will help us to understand better the intermediate stages of his growth. Immediately after *Rienzi* came *The Flying Dutchman*. On his way from Riga to Paris, in 1839, he had spent a stormy three-weeks-and-a-half upon the sea. There the legends of the sailors, set in the appropriate surroundings of the Norwegian crags, had made a deep impression on his imagination. The mournful figure of the Dutchman was an emblem of himself—another poor, homeless wanderer, fated to voyage eternally in search of ideal love and comprehension.

The old legend of the Flying Dutchman

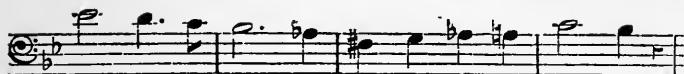
tells of a mariner who once, when contrary winds prevented him rounding the Cape, swore he would sail on "though hell itself prevail." Satan took him at his word, and the wretched man was doomed to sail the seas for ever, "without aim, without rest." Only the love of a faithful woman could redeem him; to find her, he was allowed to cast anchor and land once every seven years.

At the commencement of the first Act, the ship of Daland, a Norwegian captain, has just put in to a bay surrounded by cliffs, to seek refuge from a violent storm. While the mariners are furling the sails and throwing ropes, Daland climbs one of the cliffs and looks around him. The orchestra paints the fury of the storm, and the sailors' cries of "Hallo, ho! Hojohe!" are full of the scent and savour of the sea. The storm has driven Daland seven miles from his home, thus making it impossible for him to see his daughter Senta that night as he had hoped. A bar or two from his music will show how deeply rooted in Wagner's style at this time was the rhythmic figure already referred to once or twice—

No. 8.





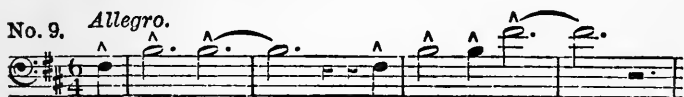


Sen - ta, mein kind, glaubt' ich schon zu um - ar - men :

with its heavy stress on the first part of the bar, imitated at the beginning of the second part.

The storm subsides a little, and having set the steersman to watch, Daland goes into his cabin to rest. The steersman sings to his sweetheart a lovely little ballad, that again has the true taste of the sea ; then he also is overpowered by sleep. The storm now breaks out afresh ; the sky darkens ; and in the distance the ship of the Flying Dutchman is dimly seen making for the shore ; its masts are black, its sails blood-red. In the orchestra we hear the ominous notes of the curse—

No. 9. *Allegro.*



The crash of the anchor of the Dutchman's ship disturbs the steersman ; he ejaculates drowsily a phrase of his previous song, then falls asleep again. The Dutchman goes ashore. To a gloomy and restless accompaniment he sings a recitative—"The term's expired"—telling of the expiry of another

seven years, of another longing search for the redeeming woman, and of his agonised belief that this quest, like all the others, will be in vain. The recitative is followed by an aria, in which he narrates his countless fruitless efforts to find death upon the seas. Sadly he lets his imagination dwell on the thought of his redemption through the love of woman; then madness seizes him again, and in accents alternately wild and mournful, he throws all hope from him, longing for the Day of Judgment that alone can give him release. His last despairing cry is echoed in sombre tones by the sailors' voices from the hold of the ship.

When Daland comes on deck he discovers the strange vessel and wakens the steersman. After repeated hailings the Dutchman answers them. He promises Daland many treasures if he will but allow him to share his home for a little time. When he learns that Daland has a daughter, he negotiates with him for her hand, the Norwegian skipper being quite willing to barter her for the Dutchman's jewels. The scene is not very impressive. The Dutchman is not so convincing as he was in the previous scene—he becomes, indeed, rather commonplace; Daland is just a stage-

puppet jerked by a string; the whole action at this point has a smack of the ridiculous in it; and the music, except at odd moments, is uninspired and uninspiring. The scene ends with a duet between Daland and the Dutchman, in which the latter's accents ring a trifle more truly.

The storm is over and the wind has changed. The Norwegian sailors joyously get their ship ready; Daland sails on in advance, followed by the Dutchman, who is consumed by longing to see Senta that day. Once more, in the closing bars, Wagner bathes us in the salt atmosphere of the sea.

The second Act is ushered in by an orchestral introduction. When the curtain rises, the scene shows a room in Daland's house. Senta's nurse, Mary, and a number of maidens are engaged in spinning, at the same time singing the charming and well-known Spinning Chorus. Senta holds aloof from the others; she is thinking of the Flying Dutchman, whose melancholy portrait faces her from the opposite wall. The other maidens banter her upon her infatuation for this phantom; at last they induce her to sing the ballad of the Dutchman. She commences the song still sitting

in her chair; as her exaltation increases she stands up in the midst of the girls, and passionately declares that she herself will be the one to free him by her devotion. Her companions are horrified. Still more horrified is her lover Erik, who has entered just in time to hear Senta's last words; he brings the news of Daland's return. Mary and the maidens go to prepare a meal for the sailors, leaving Erik and Senta together. Scared by the declaration he has heard her make, he implores her to decide for *him* and to press his claims to her upon her father. For answer she leads him before the portrait, and tells him it is *this* that has captured all her pity and absorbed her thoughts. He narrates a dream he has had, in which he saw the Dutchman and her father talking together. Senta came to them, clasped the Dutchman in her arms, and the two sailed away across the sea. This stimulates Senta to renewed exaltation, and as she again cries out her love for the wandering seaman, Erik in despair rushes from the room, crying, "She is lost! My dream was true!"

Erik is more or less a lay-figure, useful for filling up the theatrical action, but of no particular interest in himself. There is

a good deal of conventional operatic declamation between him and Senta, but the scene as a whole is kept vital and convincing by the sheer intensity of the handling of the girl. Wagner was in deadly earnest here; he was singing his own deep pain and longing for “the ideal woman.”

After Erik has gone, Senta remains with her eyes fixed on the picture, until Daland and the Dutchman enter. The sight of the latter fascinates her; she utters a cry and remains rooted to the spot as if spellbound. Here Wagner reaches out beyond the merely operatic method of his time to the subtler and more expressive methods of his later practice. The Dutchman, with his eyes fixed on Senta, slowly advances towards her. Nothing is said by either of the actors; the whole of the human expression is entrusted to gesture and facial play, while the orchestra breaks in now and then with a luminous commentary.<sup>1</sup> Daland reproaches his daughter for greeting him so coldly. “Who is the stranger?” she asks; and

<sup>1</sup> This is mostly in two parts only, moving in thirds. It was a device of which Wagner was very fond when painting the mutual longing of two souls. He employs it again in the scene between Siegmund and Sieglinde in the first Act of *The Valkyrie*.

her father explains that he is a wealthy suitor for her hand. All the time that he is speaking, neither Senta nor the Dutchman utters a word. All that is going on within them has to be conveyed in their looks; exceedingly capable acting is required to make the scene convincing, and to keep it from lapsing into the ridiculous. As Daland leaves the room, the orchestra elucidates the situation for us, throwing into strong relief the theme of the curse (No. 9), and that of redemption—



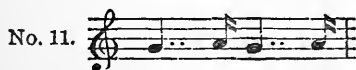
which has already been heard as the refrain of Senta's ballad in the first part of this Act.

Left alone with her, the Dutchman begins to speak of her face, which seems to him one he has already seen in a vision. He goes on to sing of his torments and his desire for release; then Senta's voice blends with his. She declares herself as his deliverer; he warns her of the fate that is in store for her, but she cannot be turned aside from her purpose, and the duet soars to rapturous heights. When Daland returns he finds them declared lovers.

The third Act opens with an orchestral

introduction that prepares us for the spiritual trial that Senta is about to undergo. First of all we hear a theme from the previous duet, where she had sung of the joy of her sacrifice; to this succeed the motive of redemption (No. 10) and fragments of the earlier sea-music.<sup>1</sup> When the curtain rises, it shows the bay at night, with the two ships lying at anchor. That of the Norwegians resounds with merriment; the Dutchman's lies dark and still as death. The Norwegians sing a fine chorus, redolent of the sea. The maidens come down to the ship with food and drink; they and the sailors in vain try to draw some sign of life from the other ship. Liszt did right to become enthusiastic over the extraordinary graphic power shown in this animated scene, with its variations and contrasts of atmosphere and feeling. Every now and then we hear in the orchestra the theme of redemption

<sup>1</sup> The hearer should note the large part played in the score by the following little melodic figure, which is repeated time after time over changing harmonies—



It occurs in the sailors' chorus, in the Spinning Chorus, in the refrain to Senta's ballad in Act II., and in many other places.

through Senta (No. 10), like a reminder that more fateful issues are brooding in the dark womb of the phantom ship than the light-hearted Norwegian sailors and maidens can know.

At last the sea round the Dutchman's vessel becomes agitated, a dull bluish flame rises from it, and the crew begin to stir. Their "Johohoe! Johohoe!" is sung to the sinister theme of the curse (No. 9). They apostrophise their missing captain, asking him sardonically if *this* love-episode has been as unsuccessful as all the others. The sea becomes more stormy round their ship, remaining calm elsewhere. The terrified Norwegian sailors again try to sing their rollicking chorus, but the Dutchmen break into it every now and then with their saturnine cries. Ultimately the Norwegians are silenced, make the sign of the cross, and vanish below, whereupon the Dutch sailors rend the air with shrill, taunting laughter. Silence again reigns everywhere, even the sea becoming calm as before.

Senta now rushes out of the house, followed by the somewhat tiresome and *de trop* Erik. An agitated duet between them follows, he trying to turn her from her desperate purpose. The dramatic and psy-



chological handling is not very convincing at this point. Erik reminds her that she has sworn eternal love to him ; she has forgotten this trifling episode and cannot recall it, so that he has to refresh her memory in a rather sugary cavatina. The Dutchman has overheard all this, and now comes forward in terrible excitement, believing he is lost. In vain Senta tries to hold him back ; he pipes up his crew and orders them to set sail. Then he tells Senta how he can be saved only by the love of a woman who shall be faithful unto death. She has indeed sworn troth to him, but not before the Eternal One ; she can therefore escape the fate of everlasting damnation that comes to all who break faith with him. He turns to depart, but Senta, holding him back, swears that she is true, and that through her an end has come to his torment. Shouting out that she does not know him, that he is the accursed Flying Dutchman, he rushes on board his ship, which immediately sails away. Senta, however, breaks from those who would detain her ; ascending a rock overhanging the sea, she cries out, “Thank thou thy Angel ! Here am I, true till death !” and leaps into the water. The phantom ship sinks with all its sailors ;

but the glorified forms of Senta and the Dutchman are seen rising heavenwards, clasped in a close embrace.

The defects of *The Flying Dutchman* are palpable to the meanest intelligence. The Dutchman, Senta, and the sailors are alive, but no one can believe in the real existence of Daland or Erik ; their life is a stage life only. The music as a whole, however, glows with an intense conviction. Although the opera was written immediately after *Rienzi*, Wagner in the interval had travelled far. The tissue of the opera is still split up into aria, duet, chorus, and so on, yet it has a quite remarkable homogeneity. It is curious to watch his first tentative, almost unconscious, experimenting with the leading-motive. Even here it gives coherence and significance to the score ; but generally speaking its management is unsubtle compared with the wonders Wagner made it perform later. The motives usually recur in their original form, or barely altered from it ; he has not yet learned the art of transmuting them, of letting them take on spontaneously a new tint and a new shape from each situation as it arises. Still it is clear that the real Wagner is coming to light in *The Flying Dutchman*—the Wagner

who loathes the old opera, and with whom libretto, vocal music, orchestra, scenery, gesture, and facial expression are all inseparable means towards the one end. Here, too, we see Wagner the moralist, Wagner the preacher, not content to let his art exist in and by and for itself, but bent on making it preach an evangel—and an evangel of a somewhat thin and sentimental kind. Senta may or may not be the “Woman of the Future”; but if she is it makes the art of the thing no better, and if she is not, that makes it no worse.

In this benighted country the only part of the opera known to the majority of people is the Overture. This superb piece of tone-painting opens with a wild storm-scene, tearing through which we hear the theme of the curse on the Dutchman (No. 8). To this there succeeds the consolatory melody of the refrain of Senta’s ballad, leading up to the motive of redemption shown briefly in No. 9. Then, after another enunciation of the curse, the Dutchman himself comes forward once more, the music reciting his wanderings and his pains in a selection from his opening solo in the first Act. This is greatly elaborated,

ultimately leading into the music of the sailors' chorus from the last Act. Once more the theme of the curse thunders out, and then Wagner proceeds to play with these subjects at once symphonically and dramatically. At last Senta's theme comes out triumphantly, followed, at the very end, by one more reference to the Dutchman.

## CHAPTER IV

### “TANNHÄUSER”

READERS of Wagner's prose works and correspondence will see that he was in an exceedingly febrile condition for some years after the composition of *The Flying Dutchman*. His eager brain was functioning at an enormous pace; after 1849, when he fled from his political pursuers to Switzerland, he worked for many years in a state of constant nervous disturbance, that brought with it the most deplorable ill-health. So excited was he while writing *Tannhäuser*, he tells us, that he was haunted by an idea that sudden death would prevent him finishing it. Here again he was embodying in artistic form another fragment of his own experiences. He suffered at this time from “a longing for the highest form of Love,” springing out of his “loathing of the modern world.” Himself no stranger to sensuous passion, there was bound to come, sooner or later, the longing

for more spiritual delights. This found expression directly in *Tannhäuser* — where sensuality and chastity are opposed in sharp antithesis—and indirectly in *Lohengrin*, where the two chief characters are set in an atmosphere of remote and mystic fleshlessness. Always there is predominant the sentimental outlook. The Dutchman is “redeemed” by Senta; *Tannhäuser* is “redeemed” by Elisabeth; *Lohengrin*, it is true, escapes this fate, but this is the fate he had sought; he also wished to find a woman “who would not call for explanations or defence, but who should *love* him with an unconditioned love.” For a long time Wagner’s thought could not get beyond this narrow psychological circle of Love and Redemption; and in contradiction to the wild encomiums of the Wagnerians upon the profound significance and great dramatic power of these poems, it just needs to be said that neither as dramas nor as poems would they set the Thames on fire, and that what still keeps people thinking of them is simply the beauty and magnificence of the music. Wagner, of course, scorned to have them regarded in this light. Years after their production he protested that their success was “due to

a misunderstanding ”—the public mulishly declining to take them so seriously on the ethical side as he did. For the plain man they were just decent bits of drama set to superb music ; so they are now, so they will always be.

*Tannhäuser* opens with a scene in the Hörselberg (Thuringia), where the mediæval mind imagined the sensual Venus to have taken up her abode. Wagner is careful to provide a fascinating picture for the eye. The stage seems to be a huge cave, with a waterfall, a brook, and a lake ; in the latter, Naiads are bathing ; Sirens recline on the banks. A tender rosy light is diffused through the cave, and by it Venus can be descried on a couch, with the head of Tannhäuser in her lap. Here and there are youths, nymphs, Bacchantes, Satyrs, and Fauns. The scene is a delirium of voluptuousness. The music harps suggestively on the one theme of love and its madness. As it reaches its height, a crowd of Bacchantes rushes forward in a frantic dance, inciting the nymphs to a kindred excitement. From the back of the stage the voices of the Sirens are heard, breathing the words “ Come to these bowers ” in long-drawn accents. Again the Bacchic

fury reigns, till it dies away in exhaustion. A thick rosy mist spreads over and obscures the whole of the stage except a small space in the front, where Tannhäuser and Venus are still left visible. Away in the distance the strain of the Sirens once more floats forward.

Tannhäuser now wakes with a start. He tells Venus he has dreamed that he heard again the bells and other sounds of earth ; he has been long in the grotto with her, far away from the sun and stars, the green of spring, the nightingales' song. Venus tries to preserve her empire over him ; three times he seizes his harp and sings. At first the burden of his song is the beauty and grace of Venus ; but each time the revolt against her grows as he proceeds, and he ends by a passionate appeal to her to let him return to earth. Her prayers and threats and seductive glances being alike unavailing, she finally rises in anger and curses him. She foretells for him misery and fruitless longing on earth. He replies that his hope is in the Virgin Mary, at the mention of whose name Venus disappears with a cry ; the cave is annihilated, and Tannhäuser finds himself in a beautiful valley, in glorious sunshine. To the right



is the Wartburg, to the left the Hörselberg ; a shrine of the Virgin is in the foreground. From the heights there floats down the song and piping of a young shepherd carolling in praise of the May-time. A number of pilgrims come from the direction of the Wartburg, singing their hymn. As they leave the stage, Tannhäuser sinks on his knees and joins in their prayer, then bows his head to the earth and weeps ; he also, groaning under the burden of his sin, vows never to rest until he has won Heaven's pardon.

Hunting horns are now heard, and from the hill on the left the Landgrave and his knights enter. Recognising Tannhäuser, they beg him to return to the Wartburg with them. He holds back, until his old friend Wolfram mentions the name of Elisabeth, the Landgrave's niece, who has loved him since he won the prize of song at one of the contests of the knights. During his absence she has lived remote from them all, heart-broken. This decides Tannhäuser ; and the animated scene, in which the musical handling is full of interest and charm, ends with him returning with them to the castle, filled with the joy of May and its “ thousand lovely voices,” and believing

that a new and sweeter life is dawning for him.

A jubilant orchestral prelude opens the second Act; in it we hear the passionate cry with which Tannhäuser, in the preceding scene, had greeted the radiant world again; this is followed by a sinister reminder of the theme to which Venus had driven him away and cursed him. The stage shows the Hall of Minstrels in the Castle. Elisabeth enters, joyously greeting the Hall of Song, which has been beloved of her for its old association with Tannhäuser and is now made doubly dear by his return.<sup>1</sup> Tannhäuser appears, and a confession of her love is wrung from the confused Elisabeth. One phrase of her music—



becomes of significance in the next Act. The music here, as a whole, lacks vitality and beauty, though the final duet between

<sup>1</sup> This is the "Elisabeth's Address" sung on the concert platform.

the lovers has the true ring, in spite of some suggestion of formalism in it.

Tannhäuser having left her, the Landgrave enters. Elisabeth allows him to guess at the cause of her new unhappiness, the orchestra keeping up a tender and expressive commentary. Then trumpets behind the stage are heard (as if coming from the courtyard). A tournament of song has been arranged, for which the knights and ladies come trooping in to the strains of the well-known march and chorus, “Hail, bright abode!”—an outburst of magnificent energy, taking on just here and there a tinge of the commonplace. The minstrels also having entered, the Landgrave addresses the assembly, announcing Love as the subject of the contest of song. Wagner was unduly fond of setting visibly before the spectator all the details of a scene. The present one is a case in point. It is hard to keep from alternately yawning and smiling at much of what goes on—the portentous solemnity of the Landgrave and some of the minstrels; the four pages tramping about with a golden cup containing papers with the names of the knights, from which Elisabeth draws one, whereupon the pages read out the name

in four-part harmony; the stage tomfoolery of the plucking of the harp as accompaniment to the song. There are a great many scenes in Wagner's operas that we cannot take quite so seriously as he did.

Wolfram is the first to be called upon; he sings nobly, earnestly, and impressively—the trying preliminary sentences being got over—of ideal, immaterial love. The company all approve except Tannhäuser, who speaks in favour of a more real, more burning passion. Elisabeth begins a sign of approval, but timidly cuts it short when she sees how ill the others receive Tannhäuser's words. Walther takes up Wolfram's theme, but only succeeds in provoking Tannhäuser to a more unbridled outburst. Then Biterolf starts up angrily and defies him to combat. Much of the music to the scene so far has not been very inspired; it is good jog-trot operatic declamation, but not of any particular strength or originality. Now, however, a warmer glow comes over it. Tannhäuser replies aggressively; Wolfram tries to recall him to his senses; but he breaks out frenziedly into the song he had already sung to Venus in the first Act—

No. 13.



All the mad ecstasy of his past experiences comes over him, and he proclaims passionately that the dull creatures who have never known this goddess do not know what love is.

There is a wild outcry ; the knights rush at Tannhäuser to slay him, but Elisabeth throws herself between them and pleads for his life. She, who suffers more than any of them, prays that he may not be killed, but allowed to live and seek salvation in penance. Her prayer is granted ; and in a huge finale Wagner blends the agonising regrets of Tannhäuser, the sorrow and the prayers of Elisabeth, and the softened but still unshakeable anger of the knights. The Landgrave advises him to travel to Rome with the pilgrims, there to ask absolution of the Pope. From the distant valley come the strains of the pilgrims' hymn ; a ray of hope lights up Tannhäuser's face, and he rushes out with the cry " To Rome ! "

The setting of the third Act is again in the

valley of the Wartburg. A long orchestral introduction reminds us of what has passed and forewarns us of what is about to happen. Fragments of the pilgrims' chorus and of Elisabeth's intercession are given out alternately; then the sombre, moaning theme of Tannhäuser's weary pilgrimage (worked up later on in the Act) breaks in. These three salient features are played off against each other, until the heavy brass thunders out the theme of the scene in Rome, where Tannhäuser is rebuffed by the Pope. After a return to the music of Elisabeth, the curtain rises, showing her kneeling at sunset before a shrine in the valley. Wolfram enters, and comments mournfully upon her unhappy state. (The orchestra brings in references to the song upon ideal love which he had sung at the tournament.) The hymn of the returning pilgrims strikes upon their ears as they pass slowly over the stage. Elisabeth eagerly scans their faces, but cannot detect the one she so much desires to see; at last she sorrowfully but resignedly ejaculates, "He has not returned!" Then she falls on her knees and sings a passionate appeal to the Virgin for consolation; the thing vibrates with a pure white light that is in exquisite keeping with

the subject and the mood. She walks slowly away, the orchestra giving out a touching reminiscence of her love-scene with Tannhäuser in the Hall of the Minstrels (No. 12).

The virginal colouring of this scene merges into deeper tints as Wolfram begins his famous address to the evening star—the orchestral and vocal handling again being admirably suited to the darkness that is now descending upon the stage. His song concluded, he continues the strain upon the harp, until a weary, fateful figure in horns and strings suggest another presence, and Tannhäuser enters falteringly, leaning on his pilgrim’s staff, pale, weary, and in rags. He recognises Wolfram, and tells him he is in search of the path that leads to Venus’ hill. He is goaded to fury by Wolfram’s question as to whether he has been to Rome ; but ultimately he is induced to tell the pitiful story of his pilgrimage—how he endured the most dreadful hardships on the journey, in order to atone for his sin ; how at last, when he told his story to the Pope and begged for forgiveness, the Pontiff held out his staff and said that sooner should this bear flowers than the sinner be absolved ; how then he had journeyed back,

meaning, since men rejected him, to forget them once more in Venus' arms. All through this scene the expression is overwhelmingly veracious; it is perhaps the finest thing Wagner had yet done.

The themes of the opening Bacchanale are again heard in the orchestra. Tannhäuser grows more feverish as he calls upon the goddess, and Wolfram vainly tries to calm him. Darkness settles upon the scene; then through it, set in a rosy light, Venus is seen reclining on her couch. A contest ensues between her and Wolfram for the soul of Tannhäuser, which is only ended by Wolfram uttering the name of Elisabeth. At the same moment a chorus of pilgrims and knights behind the scenes sings a prayer for her soul, that has now flown from her body. Venus sinks into the earth crying, "I have lost him." A funeral train of knights, pilgrims, and others descends from the Wartburg, Elisabeth's bier being carried by the minstrels. Wolfram leads Tannhäuser to it; he sinks to the earth with the cry, "Holy Elisabeth, pray for me!" and dies. The younger pilgrims now enter, bringing with them the Pope's staff, that has indeed burst into leaf—a miracle indicating that Tannhäuser has been



redeemed. They sing the melody already associated with the scene in Rome ; this is followed by a grand delivery of the pilgrims' chorus, with which the opera ends.

The Overture deals with the contest between earthly and heavenly love, symbolised in the persons of Venus and Elisabeth. It commences with the pilgrims' chorus, the opening part of which—

No. 14.



is entrusted to the clarionets, horns, and bassoons, while in the second part—

No. 15.



the theme comes out gravely in the cellos! As the chorus is repeated with fuller scoring, a violin figure, afterwards much used in the Overture, becomes prominent—

## No. 16.



Wagner tells us he meant this to symbolise “the pulse of life”—the healthy instincts of the natural man. Then the pilgrims pass away, the evening falls, a rosy mist spreads over the scene, and wild voluptuous dances are heard—

## No. 17.



## No. 18.



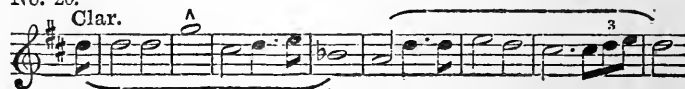
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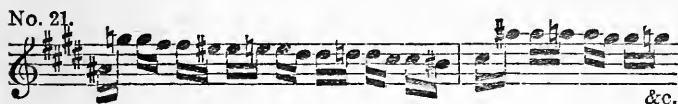
Tannhäuser now steps forward with his love-song (No. 13). The Bacchanale swirls round him, and in a suggestive half-light the form of Venus appears—

## No. 20.

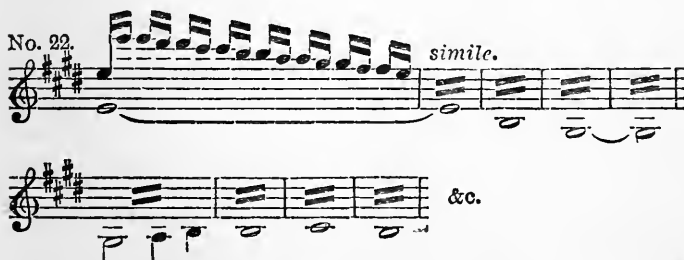
Clar.



His senses are wrought upon madly by the seductive scene; again he chants his song (No. 13) this time in praise of Venus herself, and again the Bacchantes, Nymphs, Satyrs, and Fauns break into their intoxicating dance. The tumult and fever die away till only “a wave of weird voluptuousness” sighs over the scene—



Dawn begins to break; in the distance is heard once more the pilgrims' chant. As this grows stronger, the voluptuous sigh (No. 21) grows with it and is transformed; and when the chorus proclaims that salvation has been won, this wave symbolises the pulse of life being one with the spirit of redemption. “Both dissevered elements, God and Nature, unite in the atoning kiss of hallowed Love.”<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The analysis here is based on that of Wagner himself



In the full score of the “ New Venusberg Music ” Wagner has given a detailed description of the scene it is meant to accompany. This description may be condensed thus :—

“ The stage represents the interior of the Venusberg (the Hörselberg, near Eisenach). From an opening in the rocks, through which the daylight filters dimly, a greenish waterfall plunges down the whole height of the grotto, foaming wildly over the rocks ; out of the basin that receives the water a brook flows to the further background ; it there forms into a lake, in which Naiads are bathing ; Sirens recline on the banks. In front of an opening in the grotto, stretching upwards on the left, through which comes a soft roseate light, Venus reclines on a rich couch ; before her, his head in her lap, his harp by his side, is Tannhäuser, half kneeling. The three Graces make a charming group near the couch. At the side of and behind the couch are numerous sleeping Amorettes, huddled together confusedly, like children who, tired of play, have fallen asleep. When the curtain rises, adolescents are seen reclining on the rocks, holding goblets in their hands. Enticed by the glances of the

nymphs, who are now dancing round the foaming basin of the waterfall, they hasten to join them. They play at hide-and-seek and other games. From the far background comes a swarm of Bacchantes, who break through the ranks of the amorous couples, and incite them to wilder delights. Satyrs and Fauns emerge from the clefts, and thrust themselves into the dance, between the Bacchantes and the loving pairs; they increase the confusion by chasing the nymphs; the tumult rises to a mad climax.

“At the height of the delirium the three Graces leap to their feet, horror-stricken. They try to curb the madness of the dancers and to drive them off. Impotent against them, they fear they themselves will be torn to pieces; they turn to the sleeping Amorettes, awake them, and drive them up the heights. They fly upwards like a flock of birds, then range themselves in battle-array, and, thus commanding the whole of the cavern, rain down a ceaseless shower of arrows on the tumult beneath. The wildness of the dance abates, the groups sink down exhausted. A rosy mist comes down, growing thicker and thicker as it descends. In it the Amorettes first disappear; then it

covers the entire background, so that finally, besides Venus and Tannhäuser, only the three Graces remain visible. These turn towards the foreground and approach Venus in graceful groups, as if to tell her of their triumph over the mad passion of the subjects of her kingdom. Venus casts grateful glances at them. The thick mist in the background dissolves, revealing a cloud-picture of “The Rape of Europa”; she is being carried across the sea on the back of a garlanded white bull, that is escorted by Tritons and Nereids. The mist gathers again, obliterating the picture, and the Graces interpret, in a dance, the inner meaning of the picture as a work of love.

“Then once more the mist dissolves, and in the tender dawning light Leda is seen reclining on the bank of a lake; the swan swims up to her and fawningly lays his head upon her bosom. Gradually this picture also fades away. At last the mist wholly disappears, showing the grotto deserted and still. The Graces smilingly make obeisance to Venus, and then move off slowly to the grotto of love. Deepest quiet; Venus and Tannhäuser maintain their attitudes unchanged.”

It appears from the recently published

letters of Wagner to Frau Wesendonk that ever since 1852 he had desired to alter this Bacchanale; he felt that the original version was not elaborate enough, and did not throw the spiritual side of the drama into sufficiently high relief. But he had not the musical power at that time to do what he wanted; this, he says, only came to him at the end of the 'fifties, when the *Tristan* music was in full flood within him.

The new Venusberg music serves to bring out one cardinal trait of Wagner's psychology—his passion for having everything represented visibly on the stage. Already he had altered the ending of *Tannhäuser* from the same motive. Originally neither Venus nor the body of Elisabeth came on the stage in the last scene. The attraction of the former was suggested by a red glow on the Venusberg, and the funeral of Elisabeth by the sound of mortuary bells in the distance. The visible enactment of the whole scene before the spectator was an afterthought, Wagner being "convinced that the former ending only gave a *hint* of what had actually to be communicated to the senses."<sup>1</sup> His artistic instinct here was probably right; but he frequently laid

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Uhlig*, p. 120. See also p. 129.



far too much stress on this need of “communication to the senses.” He seems to have been lacking in inward imagination; he realised things with difficulty unless they were set solidly before him. Hence his constant harping upon the necessity for “sharp, sensuous impressions.” Hence also his failure to sympathise with programme music. There, given a mere indication of the situations or the persons involved, we can reconstruct these imaginatively for ourselves under the stimulus of the music. Wagner, apparently, could not do this; and because *he* could not, he argued, in his usual way, that other people could not, or, if they could, that it was quite wrong to do so. He did not see that very often a concept is hugely impressive if entrusted to the inward eye of the imagination, while it becomes *banal* if set before the outward eye of the flesh. As Lessing put it, Milton’s lines describing Satan—

“With head up-lift above the wave, and eyes  
That sparkling blazed : his other parts besides  
Prone on the flood, extended long and large,  
Lay floating many a rood,” &c.

gives us the right idea of vastness when we read them, but no painter could depict

that vastness on canvas. Wagner's own Venusberg music is another case in point. There is something essentially childish in the pictorial faculty that can rejoice at the representation of such a series of tawdry tableaux as are outlined in the programme here, especially the solemn nonsense of the cloud-picture of the Rape of Europa, and "the Graces in a dance interpreting the hidden purport of the picture as a work of love." It is all very much more impressive on the concert-platform, where we get the full glory of the incomparable music, and the imagination discreetly adds just so much of the concrete as it requires, and no more. The explanation is probably as I have suggested—that Wagner's own imagination was relatively feeble and uncertain when not backed up by the visible representation of things. Other people are not so dependent upon the scene-shifter and the "super" for their artistic visions; and, for many of us, one strong point in favour of the symphonic poem is precisely that it *concentrates* the drama—it rouses our imagination at first hand, without the tedious and often laughable theatricality that is inseparable from the best of opera.

## CHAPTER V

### “ LOHENGRIN ”

DURING these years Wagner's growth as a musician was remarkably rapid. *The Flying Dutchman* was a great advance on *Rienzi* ; *Tannhäuser* was a great advance on *The Flying Dutchman*. The real Wagner is coming into view—the musical Titan, the magician who can do what he pleases with us, the great builder of tone-palaces the like of which the world had never yet seen. In *Lohengrin* his genius advances a step further. He had already shown an extraordinary aptitude for varying his style with each character he draws—the Dutchman is not only poetically or pictorially but *musically* different from Senta, *Tannhäuser* from Wolfram, Elisabeth from Venus. His characters were not lay figures given to him by a librettist simply to be clothed and coloured ; they grew all in a piece, as it were, words, action, and music being

indivisibly interblended parts of their composition. He saw his Elisabeth, for example, with one intuitive glance, and when he came to build her up into objective form she was shaped almost simultaneously in the three dimensions of music, poetry, and gesture. If one element in the composition of the figure did outweigh the others, it was music. He was strongest in this, and his first conception of a character, in many cases, would be as something vaguely associated with a particular *pensée musicale*. And while his general constructive powers developed in strength, clearness, and concision from work to work, his musical development was almost incredibly rapid. *Lohengrin*, by its music alone, transports us into an absolutely different world from either of the three earlier operas. The music here is something born out of the very atmosphere of the shadowy story. "Whoever," he says in one of his letters, "whoever in judging my music divides the harmony from the instrumentation does me as much injustice as he who divides my music from my poetry, my song from the words."<sup>1</sup> His musical speech is not a melody harmonised and orchestrated; it

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Uhlig*, p. 231.

is one homogeneous structure, each part of which depends upon and is incomplete without the others. *Lohengrin* represents the dividing-line of Wagner's musical genius. Most of his work up to this had been that of an able, eager apprentice. After this he takes six or seven years' rest from composition, and then, when he begins work on *The Ring*, we find that his musical sense has been slowly fructifying all the time, and is now a faculty of almost unexampled opulence, scope, beauty, and adaptiveness.

The opening of *Lohengrin* shows a meadow near Antwerp. King Henry the Fowler has summoned his adherents there to wage war with the Hungarian invaders. He sits under the Oak of Justice, surrounded by the Saxon nobles; facing them are the nobles of Brabant, headed by Frederick of Telramund, by whose side sits his wife Ortrud. Frederick gives the reason for the confusion and disunion among the nobles. The late Duke had left him guardian of his two children, Elsa and Gottfried. One day Elsa had taken her brother into the forest for a walk, and having returned without him, was suspected of having murdered him. Thereupon Frederick had

given up the right to her hand conferred on him by her father, and had married Ortrud instead. She being a descendant of the ancient rulers of the country, he now claims the kingdom for himself.

Up to this point the music has not been very interesting. It consists mostly of declamatory recitative—decent of its kind, but unable to escape the inherent baldness and woodenness of that kind. The music now grows more varied.

The King will have this matter looked into, and Elsa is summoned to appear. She comes forward slowly with her ladies, to an admirably expressive orchestral and choral accompaniment, sounding the right note of indecision and timidity. At first she can hardly reply to the King's questions; then, to music that reveals at once the gentle mystic tissue of her nature, she tells how one day, after she had called on Heaven for help, she saw in a trance a glorious knight in shining armour, who appeared from the clouds and spoke consolingly to her. Him she designates her protector and vindicator. He is sketched in the orchestra in the typical theme of Lohengrin as the Knight of the Grail—

No. 24. *8va* .....

*p* &c.

which, by its setting in the muted strings, suggests the ethereal, far-off world of which he is a denizen. It is followed by another phrase, associated with Lohengrin as the deliverer—

No. 25. *8va* .....

The King suggests to Telramund that Elsa is innocent ; but the Count hotly defends himself, and says he is ready to have the matter resolved by combat. The Herald calls for Elsa's champion, but in vain

She makes a passionate appeal to Heaven to send her deliverer; and now those nearest the water's edge see Lohengrin coming down the river, in a boat drawn by a swan. By his side hangs a golden horn. The chorus break out into surprised ejaculations, while the orchestra throws light on the situation by repeating No. 25. He alights amid general acclamations. Frederick and Ortrud are terrified and amazed; Elsa greets him rapturously. He bids the swan depart; and the chorus, in an exquisite fragment, sing in praise of his fair demeanour. Then, to phrases made more significant by the play of motives in the orchestra, he offers himself to Elsa as her champion and is accepted.

One condition, however, he makes. If Elsa becomes his bride, she is never to ask him his name, or whence he has come.<sup>1</sup> This phrase of warning—repeated to make it more impressive—is of great importance—



<sup>1</sup> This common "motive" in so many old stories is founded on the savage belief that the name is part of the being of a man, and that to give one's name to a stranger is to give him power for evil over us. See the anthropological references in my *Study of Wagner*, p. 34, *note*.



The ensuing scene, where preparations are made for the combat, is only saved from the absurdity of the theatrical by the fine seriousness of the music. This rises to noble heights in the prayer of the King that right may prevail, and in the beautiful chorus that follows it. The rivals fight in approved stage fashion,<sup>1</sup> to the accompaniment of appropriate music, until Lohengrin strikes Frederick to the ground. A scene of great excitement ensues: Elsa breaks out into rapturous jubilation, while the chorus congratulate Lohengrin in strains founded on No. 25. A big Finale is built up, Frederick and Ortrud execrating their conqueror, Lohengrin and Elsa blending in a love-duet, and the King and knights vociferously celebrating the victory.

The first scene of the second Act shows at the back the palace of the knights;

<sup>1</sup> Again we see Wagner, in his passion for visible representation, quite unsuspecting of the element of the commonplace in these scenes. Here is a clear example of how his situations are sometimes saved by the magic of his music. Stage combats are now admired only by the unsophisticated lovers of melodrama; that we tolerate in opera a number of things at which we would smile in drama, is a proof of how the musical element instantly places the “drama” in a totally different sphere, to which we apply a less rigorous standard of criticism; and it shows how exaggerated were Wagner’s claims that the music-drama was drama perfected.

at the side is the church ; in the foreground the women's dwellings. It is night ; the disgraced Frederick and Ortrud, clothed in rags, are seated on the steps of the church, listening gloomily to the revelry going on inside the palace. The orchestral prelude is appropriately dark and baleful. A theme which afterwards becomes of importance is prominent in the bassoons and cellos—

No. 27.



and a reminiscence of the motive of warning (No. 26) suggests what is going on in the minds of the guilty couple ; they will ruin Elsa by prompting her to break the promise she has given to Lohengrin.

Frederick passionately upbraids Ortrud as the cause of his losing position and honour—the plot against Elsa having originally been hers, and she having induced him to believe the lie that Elsa had murdered her brother. Ortrud tries to calm him, and tells him that Lohengrin's power will vanish as soon as he is compelled to declare his race and name, to effect which Elsa must be worked upon. All through the dialogue the sinister phrase shown in No. 27

is used with fine effect. Wagner, in fact, is now well on the way to his later method. The bulk of the expression is frequently entrusted to the orchestra, with its interplay and setting-off of motives ; the voices hover round this instrumental tissue, breaking into it with a kind of declamatory semi-speech.

Ortrud further tells Frederick that Lohengrin's power is broken if he loses the smallest limb ; in this Telramund sees a chance to regain his honour. Ortrud is now to tempt Elsa ; Frederick's part is to accuse Lohengrin to the King of sorcery, and if that fails, to attempt to assassinate him. In a brief but highly passionate duet they swear vengeance upon the lovers.

Now occurs one of those lovely changes of colour and atmosphere that Wagner handled so well. The door of the women's apartments opens, and Elsa, clothed in white, steps out on the balcony and sings a song of gratitude to the breezes that bore her rescuer to her. It is a marvel of psychological expression — white and maidenly like herself, with a kind of subdued ecstasy pulsating through it, and all of it admirably one with the night-scene in which it is set. She is accosted by Ortrud, who so works

on her sympathies that Elsa leaves the balcony in order to admit her into the house. While she is away, Ortrud calls upon her old Pagan gods for help. Elsa returns, and Ortrud tries to make her suspicious of Lohengrin, motives 26 and 27 playing a prominent part in the orchestra. As Elsa re-enters the house, taking Ortrud with her, Frederick emerges for a moment from his hiding-place.

Day is now breaking, and the *reveille* of the warders is heard echoing from turret to turret. Frederick again hides himself, and the stage begins to fill with people. The Herald comes forward and pronounces a ban on Telramund, his crown being given to Lohengrin, which announcements are received with acclamations by the crowd. Soon Elsa's bridal procession makes its way towards the church, to the strains of solemn and lovely music. She is greeted by a rapturous, full-throated chorus; but as she is mounting the church steps, Ortrud rushes forward claiming the right to enter first. She publicly taunts Elsa with her ignorance even of Lohengrin's name; her music, dramatic as it is, falls back into the set declamatory style and monotonous rhythm and accents which we have already noticed

in the three earlier operas. Elsa's reply, affirming her confidence in her lover, reminds us somewhat of Wolfram's song in the second Act of *Tannhäuser*. The King, Lohengrin, and the nobles enter from the palace; Elsa casts herself into the arms of Lohengrin, who cows Ortrud with a few angry words, and the procession turns again towards the church. Now Frederick steps forward, and accuses his rival of having defeated him by sorcery. He cannot shake the public confidence in Lohengrin, but in the general commotion he manages to draw near to Elsa, and—with motive No. 27 sounding in the wood-wind of the orchestra—he tells her that if she will only arrange that he may cut off even the finger-tip of Lohengrin, her husband's loyalty to her will be for ever assured. He is driven away by Lohengrin, into whose arms Elsa falls, reiterating her love and confidence in him; and the procession slowly enters the minster.

The third Act commences with the superb, full-blooded epithalamium with which concert-goers are familiar. The curtain then rises on the bridal chamber; Elsa and Lohengrin enter, the former led by the ladies, the latter by the nobles, to the strains of the well-known wedding chorus—



mainder drop their swords and kneel before the knight. He looks reproachfully at Elsa, and an orchestral echo of their love-duet speaks eloquently of the happiness they have lost. He gives her in charge of her ladies, then slowly and sadly departs, resolved to tell his name and race publicly before the King.

The next scene shows the banks of the Scheldt, as in the first Act, at dawn. The King and nobles, assembled in order to proceed to the war with Hungary, await only Lohengrin. Telramund's body is brought in ; then Elsa enters falteringly, the motive of warning (No. 26) and that of Ortrud (No. 27) proclaiming the cause of her grief. She is followed by Lohengrin, who, to the consternation of all, announces that he cannot lead them in the campaign. He uncovers Telramund's corpse, and asks for the verdict of the assembly on his action ; this being justified, he next arraigns Elsa before them. They had heard her pledge her word never to ask his name and origin ; this word she has broken. Now he will tell his name. He comes from the distant mountain of Monsalvat, where the precious Grail is kept. Its knights are invincible, and their mission is to defend

the innocent and right their wrongs; but this they can only do so long as their name and origin are unknown. He himself is the son of Parzifal, and his name Lohengrin. The King and chorus comment on the wondrous story in a brief *ensemble*, remarkable for its long and slow melodic descent—

No. 23. *Sva*.....

The unhappy Elsa falls to the ground. She is raised by Lohengrin, into whose heart comes a great gush of human love. He breaks out into a passionate lament over the evil she has wrought by her unfortunate curiosity. The duet between them, supported by the voices of the chorus, rises to a fine intensity of regret and passion. No entreaties, however, can now detain him. The swan is seen approaching to the strains of No. 25 transposed into the minor. Lohengrin turns to Elsa and tells her that had she trusted in him for one year her brother would have been returned to her; he is not dead, but has been transformed by sorcery. Handing his



sword, horn, and ring to her, to be given to her brother if he should ever return, he hastens towards the boat, and is about to depart amid the sorrow of all, when Ortrud, rushing forward, exultingly declares that Lohengrin's swan is really Elsa's brother, Gottfried ; she herself changed him into this form, from which Lohengrin, had he stayed, could have released him. Hearing this, the knight prays a moment. Then the white dove of the Grail flies slowly down and hovers over the boat. Lohengrin looses the chain from the swan ; it sinks, and in its place Gottfried comes up. Ortrud falls with a shriek. The dove draws Lohengrin's boat down the river, before the astonished eyes of the King and the nobles. Elsa turns from embracing Gottfried, realises that Lohengrin has gone, and sinks lifeless into her brother's arms. In the last bars of the opera the orchestra gives out the typical Lohengrin theme (No. 24).

The Prelude deals mainly with this theme in various forms. It swells from *pianissimo* to a *fortissimo* climax ; then the descending theme shown in No. 28 brings it to a quiet conclusion, the last few bars again sounding a reminiscence of the first Lohengrin theme. The Prelude thus opens and

closes again like a flower. Wagner himself wrote a programme analysis of it, which may be compressed thus :—

“Out of the clear blue ether of the sky there seems to condense a wonderful yet at first hardly perceptible vision ; and out of this there gradually emerges, ever more and more clearly, an angel-host bearing in its midst the sacred Grail. As it approaches earth, it pours out exquisite odours, like streams of gold, ravishing the senses of the beholder. The glory of the vision grows and grows until it seems as if the rapture must be shattered and dispersed by the very vehemence of its own expansion. The vision draws nearer, and the climax is reached when at last the Grail is revealed in all its glorious reality, radiating fiery beams, and shaking the soul with emotion. The beholder sinks on his knees in adoring self-annihilation. The Grail pours out its light on him like a benediction, and consecrates him to its service ; then the flames gradually die away, and the angel-host soars up again to the ethereal heights in tender joy, having made pure once more the hearts of men by the sacred blessing of the Grail.”

Beside this may be set the analysis of

Liszt, which concerns itself more closely with the actual musical texture of the piece. It will be noticed that here also the impression is of something faintly objectivating itself out of the ether, expanding to a glorious intensity of form and colour, and then fading away again into vapour :—

“ It begins with a broad, reposeful surface of melody, a vaporous ether gradually unfolding itself, so that the sacred picture may be delineated before our secular eyes. This effect is confided entirely to the violins (divided into eight different parts), which, after some bars of harmony, continue in the highest notes of their register. The motive is afterwards taken up by the softest wind instruments ; horns and bassoons are then added, and the way prepared for the entry of the trumpets and trombones, which repeat the melody for the fourth time, with a dazzling brightness of colour, as if in this unique moment the holy edifice had flashed up before our blinded eyes in all its luminous and radiant magnificence. But the flood of light, that has gradually achieved this solar intensity, now dies rapidly away, like a celestial gleam. The transparent vapour of the clouds retracts, the vision disappears little

by little, in the same variegated fragrance from the midst of which it appeared, and the piece ends with a repetition of the first six bars, now become more ethereal still. Its character of ideal mysticism is especially suggested by the long *pianissimo* of the orchestra, only broken for a moment by the passage in which the brass throw out the marvellous lines of the single motive of the Prelude."

*Lohengrin* lives and will live in virtue of the noble and beautiful music to which three-fourths of it are set. On the poetical side it indeed compares well with the average opera, but badly with the real drama. As in *The Flying Dutchman* and *Tannhäuser*, Wagner has convincingly delineated his two chief characters. But Frederick and Ortrud have the ancient smell of the footlights; they are theatrical, not dramatic, figures. The *scenario* has again that touch of the puerile that clung to Wagner like his own shadow. No one takes the swan and the dove as seriously as he did; while the transformation scene at the end of the opera is downright triviality. Great drama is not built on lines like these. We cannot, then, get up much interest in Ortrud when Wagner, in

words we have already quoted, tells us that she “is a woman who does not know love. . . . Politics are her essence. . . . There is a kind of love in this woman, the love of the past, of dead generations, the terribly insane love of ancestral pride, which finds its expression in the hatred of everything living, actually existing.”<sup>1</sup> It may or may not be so; but it really does not matter. Nor are we greatly moved when he tells us that “*Lohengrin* . . . symbolises the most profoundly tragic situation of our age, namely, the longing which besets us to descend from the highest heights of mortal contemplation and plunge into the depths of human affection—the desire to be immersed in feeling—that desire which modern reality is as yet powerless to satisfy.” All this empty metaphysic and thin sociology is merely the stage expression of what a very bad time Richard Wagner had in Dresden, and how very much he would have liked people to understand him better and love him more. The operas can be made no better by this kind of thing; it is fortunate that it cannot make them any worse. The best tribute to the magic of Wagner’s works is that they

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Liszt*, i. 192, 193.

have survived the commentaries on them of Wagner and his friends. It is the music of *Lohengrin* that has kept it alive, and that will still keep it alive when the world has almost forgotten that its composer ever wrote prose.

## CHAPTER VI

### “THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG”

IT was out of Wagner's personal need and longing, again, that his next great work was born. The early years he spent in Switzerland, after his flight from Dresden, were marked by the most atrocious ill-health ; physical suffering and mental worry combined had strung his nerves up almost to the snapping-point. There was an intense and never-ending commotion in the brain, though too often the wheels were just spinning round and round at feverish speed without grinding anything out.<sup>1</sup> Roeckel evidently diagnosed him well when he advised him, though in vain, to tear himself away from dreams and egoistic illusions, “and look at things in their

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, his fourth letter to Roeckel, pp. 77-87, where the essential thought could be put into ten lines. There is a huge whirr of intellectual machinery, but nothing comes of it all.

reality." For Wagner, the real reality was the phantom mental world in which he lived. As we have seen, he generally got at his dramatic situations by a generalisation from his own experience of the moment; if *he* was misunderstood, he drew a character who also was misunderstood, and who straightway symbolised "the only tragedy of the present."

Reflecting feverishly upon his own circumstances, it appeared to him that he was not and had not been "free." He could not "realise" himself as he would have liked, in face of the crude opposition of an ignorant society. Accordingly he will now paint a character who *shall* be free—a simple, natural, unsophisticated being, free from all the complexity, the constraint, and the sophistication of which Wagner thought modern society was composed. So he lights upon the character of Siegfried. He is to be half the essential human being; the other half, making the complete whole, is Brynhilde.

Then another personal element comes uppermost. The one need of his life was love—under which term he included many things, artistic and social. One of these things was actual, unquestionable feminine



love for himself. We know him to have been unhappy with his wife Minna. He seems to have loved her in a way; certainly he pitied her; but she was not the woman he wanted. *He* having made an unhappy marriage, the social law that prevented him getting rid of the inconvenient tie whenever he liked was, of course, a serious blot on our social arrangements. So he worked out a theory of the need for “change and renewal,” and the dilemma of a pair of people being chained to each other after love has cooled down is symbolised in the relations of Wotan and Fricka—this lady being the mythical equivalent of Mrs. Grundy. “Examine,” he says in one of his letters to Roeckel, “the first scene between Wotan and Fricka, which leads up to the scene in the second Act of *The Valkyrie*. The necessity of prolonging beyond the point of change the subjection to the tie that binds them—a tie resulting from an involuntary illusion of love, the duty of maintaining at all costs the relation into which they have entered, and so placing themselves in hopeless opposition to the universal law of change and renewal, which governs the world of phenomena—these are the con-

ditions which bring the pair of them to a state of torment and mutual lovelessness.”<sup>1</sup>

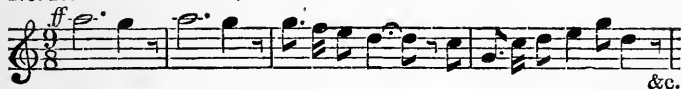
This theory of the close connection between Wagner's personal circumstances and his philosophy of the cosmos will appear fanciful only to those who in Wagner the demigod cannot see Wagner the man. But even Mr. H. S. Chamberlain admits that Wagner's marriage “was the source of daily and hourly torments. Rarely does a word escape Wagner's lips upon the subject, but when it does, it reveals an abyss of misery.”<sup>2</sup> *The Ring*, then, has its roots, like Wagner's previous works, in Wagner's personal circumstances and needs. But leaving for the present the ethical aspects of the operas, let us glance at the drama as Wagner unfolds it.

<sup>1</sup> The recently published letters to Mathilde Wesendonk throw much light on this epoch in Wagner's life. The paragraph above quoted has no doubt special reference to his passion for Frau Wesendonk, whom he met about this time. See the beginning of chapter vii. of the present volume.

<sup>2</sup> See the references Mr. Chamberlain gives to various letters to Liszt and Uhlig, in which Wagner voices his passionate longing “for a wife who shall love unreservedly,” “a woman's soul into which I can plunge my whole self, which can grasp me entirely.” The Lohengrin problem was, of course, just this.

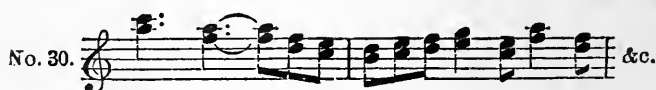
In the Rhine lies a treasure of gold, guarded by three Rhine-maidens. These are shown, in the opening scene of *The Rhinegold*, swimming about in the river in play. Everything suggests primitive nature; the Prelude is like the surging of the waters out of the primeval chaos; it consists of a long and incredibly expressive handling of the chord of E flat. Alberich, the hideous Nibelung dwarf, enters the river and tries to capture one of the maidens, but they only laugh at his ugly appearance and absurd love-making. The sun comes out and lights up the gold on the rock; it is greeted by the maidens with a lovely lyrical cry—

No. 29.



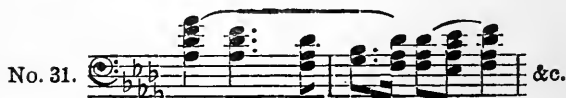
In their joy they tell Alberich of the marvel of the gold—how it will confer unlimited power on him who can get possession of it and forge from it a ring; but only he who renounces love can achieve this. His former amorous passion instantly gives way to a passion for the gold. He is willing to forswear love for it, and seizes it brutally,

driving away the terrified maidens. From it he will forge the Ring—



He dives with it, and darkness is diffused through the waters.

These gradually give place to clouds, which vanish in mist, showing a meadow among the mountains. Wotan and Fricka, his wife, are sleeping side by side. At the back, on a hill, is a glorious turretted castle. Between this and the actors is a valley, through which the Rhine flows. Wotan looks with pride on this noble pile—



Its history is told in the ensuing dialogue between him and Fricka. To be lord of the world, free from all fear of attack, he has had this castle built by the two giants, Fasolt and Fafner. In payment he has promised them Freia, the goddess of youth. This has been contracted between them most solemnly by runes engraved on Wotan's spear—



bowels of the earth—to Nibelheim, where the dwarfs are.

They find these now the slaves of Alberich; one of them, Mime, has just made for him the Tarnhelm—

No. 33.



which confers invisibility on its wearer. Loki induces him to show off its virtues; Alberich first becomes a large snake, then a toad; upon the latter animal Wotan puts his foot. They seize the Tarnhelm, bind the raging Alberich, and drag him back with them to the upper world.

Here he is ordered to summon the Nibelungs and tell them to bring the gold. He does so, thinking no more will be asked of him; but first the Tarnhelm is thrown on the pile, and then the Ring itself is

taken from his finger. In his wrath he curses the Ring and all who may possess it; it shall bring them no joy, but only pain and fear and death—

No. 34.



Fasolt and Fafner reappear with Freia; they will take gold for her, but it must be as much gold as will cover her till she is wholly hidden. The Tarnhelm has to be sacrificed to cover her head; but, worse still, Wotan is asked for the Ring to stop up a last chink through which one of Freia's eyes can be seen. He refuses, and the giants make off with Freia. Then a bluish light breaks out of the rock, revealing the fateful and prophetic Erda, who eerily urges Wotan to give up the Ring, warning him of a terrible day that is to dawn for the gods. He yields; the Ring is given to the giants, and instantly the curse works. The pair quarrel over the spoil, and Fafner slays his brother. Then he makes off with the gold and the Tarnhelm, while the orchestra peals out the terrible motive of the curse (No. 34). Horror falls on all the spectators, till Donner, to clear the air, ascends a high rock and

smites it with his hammer. There is a vivid flash of lightning followed by a thunder-clap; the clouds disappear, showing a glorious rainbow stretching over the Rhine, making a bridge from the valley to the castle. An inspiration comes upon Wotan. He sees a way out of his difficulties; he hails the castle with his spear, dubs it Valhalla, where security may be had from fear and trouble, and the gods march slowly to it over the rainbow bridge. Loki looks critically after them. "They are hastening to their end," he says, "although they deem themselves so strong;" and he goes off to flame throughout the world. Below in the valley, the invisible Rhine-maidens pour out an exquisite, haunting song of lamentation over their lost treasure.

The next stage of the story is told in *The Valkyrie*. Wotan's problem is how to get possession of the Ring again, for there is a chance of Alberich getting it from Fafner, in which case the gods, after their ill-treatment of him, are doomed. Yet Wotan himself must not seize the Ring, for Erda's warning still echoes in his ears. The only solution is this—some one must get possession of it unaided by the gods,



yet it must be one who will not use against the gods the power he thus acquires. (This free one is ultimately found in Siegfried, the hero of the third and fourth dramas of the series.) In the interval between *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie*, Wotan has had by Erda nine daughters—the wild Valkyries—who bear home to Valhalla the bodies of slain heroes, there to form a protective force for the gods. The chief of these Valkyries is Brynhilde. Further, by a union with a mortal woman, the race of the Volsungs is born to Wotan. Among these are a brother and sister—Siegmond and Sieglinde—in the former of whom Wotan hopes to find the deliverer. These two have been long separated; the homestead has been raided, and Sieglinde carried off to become the wife of black Hunding. Their father, too, disappears, and Siegmund believes himself alone in the world. One day he is worsted in a fight with his enemies, and his sword being broken he has to flee. *The Valkyrie* opens at this stage.

After a stormy Prelude we see the interior of Hunding's hut. Prominent in the centre is the stem of a great ash-tree. The storm subsides a little, and Siegmund, exhausted by the flight from his enemies, staggers in

and throws himself on the hearth. Sieglinde enters and gives the weary stranger a refreshing drink. With exquisite delicacy Wagner suggests in the orchestra the growing interest of the pair in each other. Only commonplace words pass between them, but the orchestra seconds eloquently the expressive glances of their eyes. Out of two of the motives now heard the later duet will be largely built—

## No. 35.



and

## No. 36.



Hunding enters. While Sieglinde is preparing the table for supper, her eyes involuntarily stray towards Siegmund's; and the suspicious Hunding makes inquiries about his guest. Siegmund tells his sad story, at the end of which Hunding, recognising an enemy in him, promises him shelter for that night, but at dawn of day he must meet him in combat. Sieglinde is ordered away by Hunding, who shortly follows her, with a parting threat to Siegmund. But Sieglinde has put a drug in the drink of her husband, and soon she slips back to Siegmund, who is brooding by the fire. He longs for a sword in this his need. She tells him how, when Hunding wedded her, a strange old man (Wotan) had come to the feast, and with one blow buried a sword deep in the ash-tree stem. None could pull it out, and there it still remains. Siegmund guesses that it is there for him. The pair now break into a great love-duet of surpassing loveliness; they have recognised each other as long known to each other in their dreams, and now they learn that they are brother and sister. With a huge effort Siegmund draws from the tree the sword “ Nothung ” (Needful), and a motive that was first heard at the

end of *The Rhinegold* now leaps out and flashes at us like a bared blade—



Siegmund and Sieglinde fall into a passionate embrace as the curtain falls.

In the Prelude to the second Act we get for the first time glimpses of the savage phrase that afterwards plays so large a part in connection with the Valkyries. The scene is a wild and rocky pass, in which stand Wotan, armed with spear and shield, and Brynhilde, in her warlike Valkyrie dress. He sends her to protect Siegmund in the fight with Hunding. As she springs up the rocks we hear her cry of "Ho-jotoho!"—



Then Fricka arrives in her car, drawn by two rams. She has come to find fault with Wotan; the scene is not of the highest order, Wotan cutting rather a ridiculous figure as the henpecked husband, and Fricka behaving like the quintessence of quarrelsome domesticity. Hunding has ap-

pealed to her for help; and as she is the patron goddess of the legitimate marriage-tie, she of course sides with him against the stranger who has gone off with his wife—especially as Siegmund and Sieglinde are brother and sister, and the offspring of her own husband’s adulterous adventures. She accordingly insists on Wotan giving no encouragement to Siegmund, and he is forced to consent, in spite of his sympathies being with Love unmastered by Law. She refuses to listen to his statement of the gods’ need of a deliverer to do what they themselves are barred from doing. Wotan’s discomfiture and distress are made more poignant by the frequent occurrence of the theme of the compact (No. 32), reminding us of the web of evil that his actions have gradually woven round him; while his discouragement is painted in a new motive—

No. 39.



When Fricka has gone and Brynhilde returned, he breaks out into a wail of anguish—“ I am bound in my own fetters ! I, least free of them all ! ” He tells his sympathetic daughter the story of his lust

for power and the ills that have grown out of it; after what has happened in *The Rhinegold* a good deal of the recital is superfluous.<sup>1</sup> He tells her of his own powerlessness to get the Ring from Fafner, because he is bound by his treaty; it must be won by one, not of the gods nor helped by them, who out of his own need shall work the deed. As Brynhilde proposes to disobey him and save Siegmund in spite of him, he has to warn her to fulfil his commands or undergo his wrathful punishment. He leaves her, and soon Siegmund and Sieglinde enter, Brynhilde withdrawing into a cave with her horse. Sieglinde reproaches herself for her conduct, and works herself up into a delirium of love and terror as she hears the horn of the pursuing Hunding. At last she faints, and Siegmund, sitting down, rests her head upon his knees. Brynhilde slowly emerges

<sup>1</sup> The reader will remember that Wagner worked *backwards* at the book of *The Ring*. His first conception was *Siegfried's Death* only; then he found another drama was required to make this clear, and he wrote *Young Siegfried*. This in its turn had *The Valkyrie* put before it by way of further explanation; and finally the scheme was completed with a preliminary opera, *The Rhinegold*. Thus the story Wotan now tells, necessary as it would have been had the cycle commenced with *The Valkyrie*, is rather redundant after the previous opera has set it all before our eyes.

from the cave, the orchestra sounding the theme of death—



warning us of the coming tragedy. In a scene that smites us through and through with pity and a sense of the exquisite beauty of it all, she tells him he will be defeated by Hunding, but that he will be taken to Valhalla, whither, however, Sieglinde may not follow him. In his madness he tries to slay her, but Brynhilde stays his hand. Moved by compassion, she promises him her support in the combat, and then disappears with her horse.

The fight between Hunding and Siegmund takes place on the dark mountain-top, in a violent storm, with Sieglinde wailing in the foreground. A flash of lightning shows Brynhilde protecting Siegmund; but just as he aims a deadly blow at his enemy, Wotan stretches out his spear. Siegmund's sword is shattered upon it, and Hunding buries his spear in the unarmed man's breast. Brynhilde makes towards the faint-

ing Sieglinde, lifts her on her horse, and disappears with her. In the clouds Wotan is seen gazing sorrowfully at Siegmund's body ; he addresses a few words to Hunding, and then, with a contemptuous gesture, strikes him dead. As the curtain falls, Wotan disappears, resolved in his rage to find and punish Brynhilde.

The third Act commences with the wild, elemental music so well known in the concert-room as the Ride of the Valkyries. The scene is on the top of a rocky mountain ; the clouds are flying before a storm-wind. The eight Valkyries are now and then seen, in the lightning flashes, riding on horse-back over the rocks, with the bodies of slain warriors hanging from their saddles. We hear their half-animal cry (No. 38), and the theme typical of the rude energy of their riding—

No 41.



mingled with the shrill whinnying of the horses. As a piece of sheer tone-painting



it is marvellous. Wagner has drawn to perfection the strange nature of the Valkyrie, half-woman and half-animal, half-fascinating and half-repulsive—the product of days when the primeval earth-energy threw itself into violently, terribly beautiful forms.

Brynhilde enters breathlessly with Sieglinde; she is flying in terror from the wrath of Wotan, and implores in vain the protection of her sisters. Sieglinde herself, in her anguish, prays to be slain; she is only calmed by Brynhilde telling her she must live for the sake of the Volsung babe she will bear to Siegmund. This child is of course the dauntless Siegfried of the next two dramas; the orchestra gives out his theme to the words, “the highest hero of the world thou hidest in thy womb!”—

No. 42.



Sieglinde hastens to the forest, leaving Brynhilde to brave the wrath of Wotan, who now arrives. He sternly orders the other Valkyries to give her up to him, but

the profound sorrow in his heart is testified to by the constant occurrence of No. 39 in the orchestra. He sadly reminds Brynhilde how she had once been dearer to him than any of her sisters ; now he disowns and banishes her. She is to be laid asleep, to fall into the hands of the first man who shall find and waken her. All cry out against this doom ; but the incensed Wotan orders away the other Valkyries, and then turns again to Brynhilde. She implores him to tell her the full meaning of the crime she has committed, that calls for so cruel a punishment. She tells him she has read his heart better than he himself could do ; she had seen his *true* wish, and tried to realise it. She knew his love for the Volsungs, and she tells him of the babe that Sieglinde bears within her, and of the pieces of Siegmund's broken sword that she has carried away. The god gravely owns that she has understood part of his soul, though she knows nothing of his direful dilemma and his anguish. Finally his love for her draws one concession from him ; round the rock on which she is to sleep he will place a raging and consuming fire, through which only a hero can penetrate.

Then follows the solemn scene, so familiar

to concert-goers, known as Wotan's Farewell—a scene of Olympian dignity and profound pathos. To music that reaches heights such as even Wagner seldom attained, he lays her on a mossy mound, closes her helmet, covers her with her great shield, and then, striking the rock with his spear, calls up the engirdling tongues of flame. Stretching out his spear with a noble gesture, he says, "He who fears my spear shall never stride through this fire!" Then he slowly disappears, casting to the last looks of regretful love at Brynhilde.

In the scene in *The Rhinegold* where Wotan and Loki, in Nibelheim, are talking of Alberich to Mime, the dwarf's recital of his troubles is accompanied by a series of falling thirds, in the orchestra; the commentators usually style this the motive of reflection—Mime thinking out the problem of the Ring and the power it confers on his master. In the Prelude to *Siegfried* we hear these thirds standing out faintly and darkly against a prolonged tremolo in the lower strings. Later on comes the motive heard in *The Rhinegold* when the Nibelungs were forging the metal for Alberich; henceforward this theme will be

particularly associated with Mime. Then comes a suggestion of Alberich and his former triumph, then of the Ring, then of Fafner, then of the sword. The meaning of it all is that we are now to be introduced to Mime in his new surroundings, and see him reflecting upon the story of the treasure, and considering how he himself may become the possessor of it.

It is in this way that he now steps into so prominent a place in the drama. The unhappy Sieglinde has died in the forest in giving birth to Siegfried, and has left the child in the care of Mime, together with the fragments of Siegfried's sword, "Needful," by means of which the Ring can be wrested from Fafner. Mime, too weak and cowardly to attempt this himself, hopes to make use of Siegfried for the purpose. Siegfried is now a glorious youth of twenty, unsophisticated, free from fear; he has grown up among birds and animals, and has never seen a human being besides Mime. Sword after sword Mime has forged for him, but the boy shatters them each in turn.

The curtain rising shows Mime in his cave, hammering yet another sword on the anvil. He muses petulantly on Siegfried's

rough handling of his work. Then a thought occurs to him—there is *one* sword that the boy could not splinter, but this, to be made from the fragments left by Sieglinde, it is beyond his strength to forge. He thinks of Fafner, whose theme now emerges in the orchestra; it has first been heard in *The Rhinegold*, in this form—

No. 43.



suggesting the awkward, contorted floundering of a huge dragon, into which Fafner has now changed himself the better to guard the gold.

Siegfried's breezy character is revealed at his first entry. He comes in sounding his horn-call—

No. 44.



and leading by a rope a big bear, which he drives after the terrified Mime. The new sword at which the dwarf has been working he smashes like the rest, storming at his

unfortunate foster-father. Mime whines of his love and care for the boy, but Siegfried passionately tells him how he hates his ugly visage and loathsome ways. Then in accents of heart-searching tenderness he speaks of the great fact of nature he has observed in the woods—how birds and beasts live lovingly in pairs, clinging to each other and to their young. Thus has he learned the meaning of the word mother, and now he asks Mime where his own mother is. Mime again tries to put him off with cajoleries; but Siegfried knows that the young resemble their parents, and he has seen his own face in the brook, and knows it is not like Mime's. In a rage he takes the dwarf by the throat and forces from him the whole story of his birth. When he hears of the pieces of his father's sword he imperiously orders Mime to fashion it forthwith into a weapon for him, that with it he may roam the woods, free and fearless.

The wretched Mime, knowing the hopelessness of this task, is crouching down behind his anvil in despair, when Wotan enters. Obsessed by his grave problem, he has long been journeying through the earth, disguised as the Wanderer. He wears a long dark blue mantle; on his head is a wide

hat with over-hanging brim ; in his hand he carries a spear for a staff. Mime rather resents his presence ; the Wanderer trying to pacify him, they ultimately agree upon a contest of wits. Each shall ask the other three questions ; the one who cannot answer them all shall lose his head. Mime's three questions are “What race lives in the bowels of the earth ? ” “What race lives on the earth ? ” and “What race lives in the cloudy heights ? ” to which the Wanderer gives the correct answers—the Nibelungs, the giants, and the gods. Then Wotan in his turn asks, “What is that race that Wotan dealt hardly with, and that yet was so dear to him ? ” Mime replies, “The Volsungs.” The next question is, “With what sword shall Siegfried slay Fafner ? ” to which again Mime gives the right answer, “With ‘Needful’.” But to the third query “Who shall fashion this sword from its splinters ? ” he cannot find the reply.<sup>1</sup> Wotan supplies it for him—“Only he who has never known fear.” Then he leaves

<sup>1</sup> This game of questions and answers takes a considerable time, and during it the stories of *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie* are told again. This is another of the defects of repetition due to Wagner having worked backwards at his dramas.

Mime aghast, with the remark that he will not take the head he has won, but will leave it forfeit to him who has never yet felt fear.

Mime works himself into a paroxysm of terror, in the midst of which Siegfried returns and demands the sword. Mime now wishes to make him fearful, but his recital of the terrors of the forest have no effect on the boy, who still wonders what this fear can be, and where he will first experience it. The orchestra, by enunciating the slumber-motive of Brynhilde, seems to answer that fear will first come to him from his love for this maiden, and not, as Mime goes on to say, from the dragon Fafner.

Then Siegfried demands the sword again, and as Mime confesses his impotence he proceeds to forge it himself, in a scene of incomparable animation, through which the fire and ardour of youth course like the sap through a strong young tree. The unhappy Mime muses upon the situation. If Siegfried is not taught fear by the dragon, Mime's head is doomed ; on the other hand, if Fafner overcomes Siegfried, Mime's chances of ever getting the Ring are very remote. Finally he resolves that if Siegfried conquers the dragon, he will drug him



with a draught, and then slay him with his own sword. Mime is indulging in golden dreams of the power the treasure will give him, when the exuberant Siegfried finishes the sword, and tests it upon the anvil, which with one huge blow he splits from top to bottom.

The dark and sinister Prelude to the second Act deals first of all with the old “giant” motive of *The Rhinegold*, transformed into a heavier and clumsier form to suit the new shape of Fafner. After some references to the Ring theme, the old motive of Alberich’s curse is heard (No. 34). The scene is a thick forest, showing the entrance to a cave. It is dark night; gradually we are able to distinguish Alberich, sitting brooding by the rocks, which he haunts in the hope of recovering the treasure from Fafner. The Wanderer enters from the forest, and pauses opposite Alberich. They discuss the adventures of the Ring, and Alberich, in accents of hatred, tells how he will humble the gods and seize Valhalla when the gold is his again. The Wanderer bids him be calm; there is one coming who shall fell Fafner and take the Ring, though Wotan will not aid him in any way. He jocularly suggests that Alberich shall

warn Fafner of his danger, and ask for the Ring, in return for his kindness. He calls up the dragon, and Alberich eagerly tells him of the coming of the hero who will humble him ; but the monstrous Fafner only replies that he hungers for the youth, and with a yawn resumes his interrupted slumber. The Wanderer goes off accompanied by the curses of Alberich, who hides himself in a crevice as Mime and Siegfried enter, the latter wearing his sword. Mime has brought him hither to learn fear.

After an acrimonious dialogue, he drives Mime away, and, throwing himself down under a linden tree, muses upon his parentage, the orchestra all the time painting the sweet, languorous life of nature. His heart swells as he thinks of the mother he never saw, and tries to imagine her form. Then he listens again to the movement of the forest, and in particular to the song of the birds.<sup>1</sup> This he tries to answer, first with an improvised reed, then with his horn.

<sup>1</sup> This is the scene played at concerts as the *Waldweben* (movement of the forest). It is one of those triumphs of delineation that put Wagner in a class by himself as a pictorial musician. Until the coming of Richard Strauss there was no one who could compare with him in this line.

This rouses Fafner, who crawls forward heavily.<sup>1</sup> The scene that follows is not of an elevated order of drama ; one requires to become very childlike in spirit to take it seriously. The boy and the dragon bandy threats like a couple of music-hall wrestlers, and then, after a typical stage combat, Siegfried plunges his sword into Fafner’s heart.

The ensuing dialogue, however, saves the situation. The dying dragon asks Siegfried who prompted him to this murderous deed, and the orchestra enlightens us by breathing out the fateful motive of the curse upon the Ring (No. 34). This appears again when Fafner with his last breath warns the boy that he who urged him to this act will try to compass *his* death also. As Siegfried draws out the sword from the body, his fingers are smeared with blood. He instinctively licks it off, and at once is able to understand the song of the birds. A bird (a boy’s voice), in the branches of the tree above him, tells him of the Ring

<sup>1</sup> The stage-directions here will help the reader to realise the scene: “The body of the dragon is a hollow framework ; when this comes to the high ground, a trap underneath it opens, from which the singer of Fafner’s part sings through a speaking-tube that runs up into the jaws of the monster.”

and the power it will give him. As he disappears in the cavern to get the Ring, Mime slinks on, but is pounced upon by Alberich. They are still quarrelling over the future division of the spoil when Siegfried comes out with the Ring and the Tarnhelm. He is ignorant of their virtues; to him they are only beautiful trophies of his victory. The friendly bird again warns him against Mime, who, with Alberich, had vanished at Siegfried's approach. The dwarf now reappears, and tries to cajole the hero. He is supposed to be speaking soft words to Siegfried, of which the latter, however, fathoms the real, murderous meaning by dint of having tasted the dragon's blood. The best solution of this difficult situation that Wagner could find was to make Mime say audibly exactly what he is thinking; that is, while he imagines he is saying one thing he is really saying another. This is the way Wagner tries to bring it home to us that Siegfried is piercing through the dwarf's honied words to his treacherous thoughts. It is a clumsy and artificial expedient, that the wild Wagnerian would be the first to smile at did it occur in any other writer.

Finally Mime offers him the poisoned

draught, and Siegfried in a sudden impulse of anger slays him ; once more, as this new victim of the Ring dies, the sombre motive of the curse (No. 34) is heard. Siegfried throws the body into the cave where the gold lies ; then he blocks the entrance with Fafner's body. He grows sad at the thought of his loneliness ; again he appeals to his little songster for advice, and is told of the lovely maiden who sleeps on the rock, guarded by fire—Brynhilde, the bride who waits for one who does not know fear. In response to his joyous cry, the bird flies in front of him, leading the way to the Valkyrie.

The presence, in the Prelude to the third Act, of the Erda motive from *The Rhinegold*, combined with the motives of Wotan's despair (No. 39) and the agreement on his spear (No. 32) informs us of the subject of the coming scene. We see a wild rocky region, at night ; a violent storm is raging. The Wanderer strides in, and at the mouth of a cavern calls loudly to Erda to appear. The ancient goddess slowly rises from the earth, made visible by a bluish light that glows in the chasm. She is covered with hoar-frost ; from her hair and garments comes a glittering light.

Wotan asks her advice upon his ever-besetting problem, but she cannot help him. At length, after recounting to her the story of Brynhilde's disobedience and punishment, he confesses that now he troubles no longer about the doom of the gods. It has to be; but the Ring is in the hands of Siegfried the Volsung, who with Brynhilde, will redeem the world. The great bulk of this scene is quite superfluous after all that has been put before us in the two earlier operas.

Erda sinks into her sleep again, and morning dawns upon the stage. The Wanderer leans his back against Erda's chasm. Siegfried enters, following the bird that is still conducting him to Brynhilde's rock. He has a long altercation with Wotan, who will not get out of the impatient young man's way. The scene is not very impressive. It is, of course, meant to be symbolical—to suggest the contest of the new, free spirit with the old law. But it is difficult to *act* symbolical scenes; it is hard for the spectator to pierce through the visible thing to the invisible thing that is meant to be conveyed. So that the passage of words between Wotan and Siegfried is too much like an ordinary

quarrel between two ordinary individuals over a right-of-way; and when finally Wotan holds out his spear, which Siegfried cuts in two with his sword, and Wotan picks up the pieces and walks off with them, saying, “Pass, I cannot prevent thee,” all this, that would be quite impressive if narrated and left to the imagination, becomes a trifle banal when enacted on the stage.

The scene now gradually fills with fire-clouds and flames, so that Siegfried, appearing to move towards the heights, becomes invisible. This takes place during a fine orchestral interlude in which great play is made with a number of the leading motives already known to us. The clouds fade into mist, and as this too vanishes we see again the rock with the sleeping Brynhilde, as at the end of *The Valkyrie*. Siegfried advances, and discovers what he takes to be a sleeping warrior. He removes the shield and the helmet; the long hair falls down, dazzling him with its beauty. Then he takes off the cuirass, and is astonished to find a woman in soft feminine drapery. At so new a sight as this he is thrown into great uneasiness; trembling through and through, he has at last learned what fear is—through the love of a woman.

And now Wagner proceeds to build up one of those huge finales that send us away, dazed and drunk with beauty. Siegfried's emotions overpower him ; he presses a kiss on the lips of the sleeping Valkyrie, and so awakens her. She rises, and in majestic tones greets the sun once more. At first she welcomes her deliverer ecstatically ; then, as she remembers her god-head, sadness comes over her, and she laments having fallen into the hands of one born of earth. She fights against his love, and in a beautiful strain begs him to leave her in peace, undisturbed by sensuous incitement—

No. 45.



and greets him as the hope and treasure of the world—

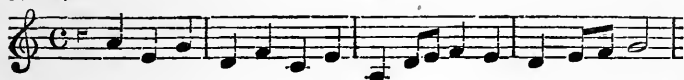


No. 46.



But the ardour of Siegfried infects her, till finally the woman in her overpowers the goddess; their love courses triumphantly through their veins—

No. 47.



Brynhilde casts off Valhalla and the gods, faces composedly the thought of their destruction, and throws herself rapturously into the arms of Siegfried.

The opening of *The Twilight of the Gods* is big with impending doom. On Brynhilde's rock we dimly see the three Norns, or Fates. They are weaving and unravelling their threads, and pondering darkly over what has been and what shall be. They tell how Wotan broke off a branch from the world's ash-tree to make his spear; how Siegfried shattered this spear with his sword; and how Wotan and the gods then cut up the tree and piled the

faggots round Valhalla, waiting the time when their end should come in flames. But just as the Norns are anxiously trying to see into the future, the cord snaps, and we hear in the orchestra once more the terrible curse-motive (No. 34), reminding us of the evil that still weighs upon everything. The Norns disappear, recognising the futility of their wisdom.

Morning slowly dawns; Siegfried and Brynhilde emerge from the cave—he in full armour, she leading her horse Grani by the bridle. A new theme, expressive of Brynhilde's love, makes its appearance—

No. 48.



while the joyous boyish horn-call of Siegfried (No. 45) is now transformed, like himself, into something more manly and more strenuous—

No. 49.

A brief duet ensues between the pair. She is sending him out into the world in search

of adventures, having taught him many runes of wisdom. Siegfried gives her the Ring, which till now he has worn on his own finger; in return she gives him Grani and her shield. He disappears with the horse behind the rocks, and Brynhilde stands on the cliff, watching his course down the valley. Then comes the piece of orchestral description known at concerts as "Siegfried's Rhine-Journey." His approach to the Rhine is symbolised definitely by the great surge of the music already heard in *The Rhinegold* in association with the Rhine-maidens. At length traces of Alberich are to be distinguished; then comes a new theme—

No. 50.



This is representative of Hagen, the half-brother of Gunther (King of the Gibichungs), and son of Alberich. Hagen is to be Alberich's means of getting the Ring, as Siegmund was Wotan's.

The scene shows the hall of the Gibichungs on the Rhine, with the open back

looking towards the river. On the throne are Gunther and his sister Gudrun; at the table sits Hagen. He laments that Gunther and Gudrun are both unmarried; and he tells his half-brother of the bride that would please him—Brynhilde, who must be approached fearlessly through the fire. Gunther, he admits, is incapable of this; but—ignorant of what has already happened—he thinks Siegfried might win Brynhilde for Gunther, and then himself marry Gudrun. If Siegfried be already enamoured, the wily Hagen will give him a potion that will make him forget every other woman and love Gudrun.

Just then Siegfried arrives, offering friendship or enmity to Gunther. They become friends, and soon Gudrun, under the plea of hospitality, offers the hero the magic potion of forgetfulness. In his ignorance of its contents, he pathetically drains the goblet to his bride Brynhilde; the next moment all thought of her has gone, and he is inflamed with passion for Gudrun. If he can have her for wife, he will go through the flames and win the Valkyrie for Gunther, changing his form by means of the Tarnhelm. They swear blood-brotherhood, the crafty Hagen, however,

abstaining from entering into the bond, on the plea of the unworthiness of his race. Siegfried and Gunther set off to the flaming rock; Hagen sits down in front of the hall, and ponders malignantly on the coming ruin of Siegfried. He knows he owns the Ring, and thinks in this way to get it from him.

The scene once more changes to Brynhilde's rock, where the Valkyrie is seen contemplating lovingly the Ring that Siegfried has given her; that her thoughts are with her hero is shown by the occurrence in the orchestra of theme No. 46. Fragments of the Valkyries' ride are heard, and soon Valtraute, one of the Valkyries, comes in. Setting aside the ban of Wotan, that forbade them all to see their erring sister, she has come to tell Brynhilde of what has recently happened in Valhalla—how, after the shattering of his spear by Siegfried, Wotan and the gods retired to the castle, surrounding it with faggots, where in sombre silence they await the end—much the same story as we have already heard from the Norns in the Prelude. One day Wotan had said that if the Ring were but restored to the Rhine-maidens, both gods and men would be

released from the curse ; and it is to beg Brynhilde to make this sacrifice that Valtraute has come. But the Valkyrie refuses to part with what has been Siegfried's bridal gift ; and she bids Valtraute return and tell the gods that rather will she see Valhalla crumble to ruins.

After Valtraute has gone, Brynhilde gazes for a moment down the valley ; the tongues of flame draw nearer and nearer, and realising that Siegfried is coming, she runs with an ecstatic cry to meet him. But Siegfried, wearing the Tarnhelm, appears in Gunther's form ; half his face is concealed by the Tarnhelm, leaving only his eyes visible. Brynhilde greets him with a shriek of "Betrayed !" He tells her he is Gunther, and that she must wed him ; she tries to ward him off by the power of the Ring, but this, which would be a protection against any other man, is of no avail against him, and after a struggle he tears it from her finger. She is forced to enter her dwelling-place, followed by Siegfried ; between them, however, he places his sword, to witness that he has won her not for himself but for his blood-brother.

The second Act opens with a grisly scene. We see the river-bank in front of the hall

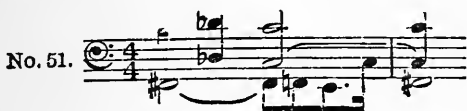
of the Gibichungs. It is night. Hagen sits sleeping against a pillar of the hall, with his spear in his hand and his shield by his side. Suddenly the moon comes out and shows Alberich crouching before Hagen, leaning his arms on his son's knees. He begs Hagen to make sure of the Ring, for Siegfried knows nothing of its virtues, and if it once gets into the hands of the Rhine-maidens again it can never be recovered. It is an extraordinary scene, the like of which we may seek in vain outside Wagner.

Alberich disappears, and daylight dawns. Siegfried enters and tells to Hagen and Gudrun the story of his capture of Brynhilde, whom he has left to be escorted hither by Gunther, he having resumed his own form by the aid of the Tarnhelm. A picture full of rude and primitive energy follows as Hagen calls up the vassals to do honour to their returning lord and his bride. Then Gunther and the downcast Brynhilde arrive in a boat, and are vociferously welcomed by the vassals. At length Siegfried and Gudrun emerge from the hall; at the sight of Siegfried, Brynhilde is overwhelmed with terror and astonishment. But he has forgotten her, and leads his new bride Gudrun unsuspect-

ingly to her. Brynhilde is stupefied at seeing on Siegfried's finger the Ring, which she believes Gunther to have wrested from her. An appeal to the latter for enlightenment is fruitless; then it dawns on her that it was Siegfried himself who overcame her, and she turns on him in fury. He, of course, cannot see the situation as she does; he contemplates the Ring, absorbed in thought, and says he won it from the dragon. Hagen now steps between them. If it is 'Gunther's Ring, he says, Siegfried must have stolen it from him; an answer, too, must be given to Brynhilde's assertion that Siegfried has wedded her. The hero swears his innocence and loyalty on Hagen's spear; Brynhilde, on the same spear, swears he is perjured and a traitor, and calls for vengeance on him. But Siegfried still cannot comprehend; he shrugs his shoulders and leaves with Gudrun and the vassals, whom he infects with his own healthful gaiety. Gunther, Hagen, and Brynhilde remain, each contemplating the terrible situation in the depths of his own soul—Gunther sunk in shame and dejection, Brynhilde vainly trying to understand the meaning of it all, and Hagen plotting darkly the accomplishment of his own ends.



He persuades Gunther that Siegfried must die; Brynhilde has told him that in the back alone did she leave him vulnerable when she threw her protecting magic over him. As Gunther hesitates on account of the pain the deed will give to his sister, it is agreed that there shall be a hunt next day, from which Siegfried shall be brought home dead, apparently through the attack of a boar. Through all this scene there runs the sinister motive of the theme of vengeance—



The first scene of the third Act shows us a wild and rocky valley by the Rhine; in the water swim the three Rhine-maidens, still lamenting the loss of the gold. Siegfried's horn-call is frequently heard (No. 44); and soon he himself appears on the cliff—he has lost his way in the pursuit of a bear. The maidens try to coax the Ring from him. At first he refuses it to them, and they disappear; then he calls them back and offers it to them, but they solemnly bid him keep it until the evil that lies hidden in it becomes clear; *then* he will be glad to

part with it. They tell him the story of the curse that is on the Ring, and warn him that he shall die that very day if he refuses to give it to them. He replies that he would surrender the Ring for love, but never for threats. The maidens leave him with a further warning; then the sound of hunting horns is heard, and Gunther, Hagen, and the vassals appear. Siegfried joyously pledges Gunther in a horn of wine, but the dispirited monarch cannot shake himself clear of the clouds of the tragedy he feels piling up around him. They have all heard that Siegfried can understand the language of birds; so to cheer their spirits he sings them his own story, of Mime and the sword, the slaying of Fafner, the bird's communication, the getting of the Ring and the Tarnhelm. Here Hagen puts a herb in his wine that brings back his memory of Brynhilde. He goes on to tell how he went through the fire and made the Valkyrie his wife—Gunther listening in amazement. Two ravens come from a bush, hover over Siegfried for a moment, and then fly towards the Rhine. "Canst read the speech of these ravens?" asks Hagen; and as Siegfried turns to look at them his enemy

plunges his spear into his back. In the scene of horror that ensues, Hagen disappears over the heights, while Gunther, smitten with anguish, bends down by the side of the dying man. Brynhilde is in his thoughts at the last; he dies recalling the episodes of their love.

By this time night has fallen. The men silently raise Siegfried's body and carry it away across the hills, to the accompaniment of that stupendous death-march that seems something too cosmic for mere human clay. It passes in review various scenes of Siegfried's life; the joyous horn-call (No. 44), appears, transformed into an inexpressibly heroic and tragic theme; then the tender melody of Brynhilde's love is heard (No. 48). All this time mists from the Rhine have been slowly rising, gradually veiling the scene; as these pass away we see the hall of the Gibichungs, as in the first Act.

Gudrun appears, consumed with anxiety for Siegfried. Hagen enters and tells her the hero has been killed by a boar; he is soon followed by the funeral train. Gudrun cannot be consoled; she pierces through the web of lies and knows her husband has been murdered. Gunther breaks down and

denounces Hagen, who then boldly admits and glories in his deed. He claims the Ring; Gunther disputes his right to it, it being his sister's dowry. They draw their swords, and once more the terrible curse-motive is heard as Hagen slays Gunther—yet another victim to the fateful Ring. Hagen tries to pull the Ring from Siegfried's finger, but the dead man raises his hand threateningly. Just then Brynhilde advances from the back. She alone is calm; the whole tangled tissue has become clear to her eyes, and the future lies with her. In dignified tones she orders them to erect a funeral pyre by the river. This is done. After a few words of solemn reproach to the gods, she draws the Ring from Siegfried's finger and signs to the men to place the body on the pyre. Apostrophising the Rhine-maidens, she promises them the Ring, bidding them melt it back again into its primal innocent gold; then, placing the Ring on her own finger, she seizes a torch and fires the pyre, with the words, "The end of the gods has come; thus I throw my brand into Valhalla's splendid towers." Her horse Grani is brought in. The rapture of reunion with Siegfried grows upon her; the flames fire

her blood to a divine delirium ; and mounting Grani she rides him into the burning mass. As the huge conflagration spreads, the spectators crowd away from it in terror. The flames die away to smoke ; then the Rhine rises in a mighty flood, the three maidens being carried by it near the pyre. Hagen makes a desperate effort to get the Ring ; casting away spear, shield, and helmet, he plunges into the flood ; two of the Rhine-maidens throw their arms round his neck and drag him into the depths, while the third exultingly holds the recovered Ring aloft. A ruddy glow appears in the heavens ; the waters of the Rhine subside, and Valhalla is seen breaking into flames, that envelop the gods as the curtain falls.

To discuss *The Ring of the Nibelung* adequately would mean a treatise as long as the dramas themselves. The wise man will read all that Wagner and the commentators have said about the moral intentions of the poem, and then quietly forget most of it. Wagner meant *The Ring* to teach many lessons, and for those who like this kind of thing this will be just the kind of thing they will like. But it really gives us no particular pleasure to learn that

Siegfried is "the Human Being in the most natural and blithest fulness of his physical life; no historic garment more confined his limbs,"<sup>1</sup> and so on; or that the development of the whole poem "sets forth the necessity of recognising and yielding to the change, the many-sidedness, the multiplicity, the eternal renewing of reality and of life. Wotan rises to the tragic height of *willing* his own destruction. This is the lesson that we have to learn from the history of mankind: *to will what necessity imposes*, and ourselves to bring it about. The creative product of this supreme, self-destroying will, its victorious achievement, is a fearless human being, one who never ceases to love: Siegfried . . . Moreover, Siegfried alone (man by himself) is not the complete human being: he is merely the half; it is only along with Brynhilde that he becomes the redeemer. To the isolated being not all things are possible; there is need of more than one, and it is woman, suffering and willing to sacrifice herself, who becomes at last the real, conscious redeemer: for what is love itself but the 'eternal feminine'?"<sup>2</sup> One gets very

<sup>1</sup> *Prose Works*, i. 375.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters to Roeckel*, pp. 97, 98-99.

weary of all this Teutonic moonshine, particularly of the perpetual sentimentalising about redemption through love. Had Wagner left no letters and no prose works we should have been spared many acres of pseudo-philosophy from his worshippers—for it all comes from the prose, not from the operas themselves.

If *The Ring of the Nibelung* contained nothing more than this thin philosophising it would not have lived a day. But it has something more and better than that. It is, beyond all comparison, the biggest thing ever conceived by the mind of a musician. Here we see the great brain that can look before and after, planning a huge scheme with the ardour, the audacity and the certainty of a Napoleon or a Spencer. Long will it be before the world sees again so vast and yet so coherent a body of musical thinking as this. It is too big to be perfect; but in its inevitable imperfection it is greater than the bulk of smaller and more formally perfect things. Wagner made all comparisons between his own operas and those of other men absurd. This was true even of his earlier works, with their close, sinewy texture and earnest dramatic purpose. It is much more true

of *The Ring*, to judge the greatness of which we have to test it by the standards he himself has given us. Then we realise the continuity of its thought, the infinite variety of its interest, the inexhaustible faculty of musical invention that runs through it, its amazing ease of handling. Think of the scenes in it and the characters of it—the gods, the men and women, the dwarfs, the nymphs, the birds—and see with what infallible veracity he finds for each of these the one appropriate expression, and how wide is his range of characterisation. Then, when you have learned to wonder at the opulent musical faculty that gave birth to all these varied beauties, see with what almost incredible art he has woven his score out of his leading motives, with a comprehensiveness of grasp and a flexibility of resource that make the biggest symphonic working appear in comparison a trivial thing. There are, of course, bald patches in the dramas. It is quite clear, in many places, that the main thing Wagner had his eye upon was the orchestral tissue—the multiform and polychromatic play of motives telling their own story to the ear—and that the voice part has been made to fit in with this the best way it could,



sometimes with success, sometimes not. There is, too, an over-use of the system of leading motives. This system is the most powerful of all Wagner's instruments of dramatic expression; he has done wonders with it; but there are occasions when he employs it unnecessarily. There is really no need to sound a particular motive *every* time there is a reference to the character or the event which it illustrates; there are occasions when the allusion is so self-evident that the introduction of the motive seems a pleonasm. In *The Twilight of the Gods*, again, the world is probably right in seeing a slight failure to rise to the heights of the other three dramas—not as a whole, of course, but here and there. Whether the cause be the earliness or the lateness of the musical conception,<sup>1</sup> there is not quite the same plastic quality in the themes as in those of *The Rhinegold*, *The Valkyrie*, and *Siegfried*; nor does the orchestra speak with quite the same unerring lucidity. Between the different parts of a work that has occupied an artist for more than twenty years it would be unreasonable to expect

<sup>1</sup> *The Twilight of the Gods* was planned in 1848, and Wagner must have invented some of the music then; but the opera was not completed until 1872.

absolute homogeneity; yet it is a homogeneity only just short of absolute that Wagner here achieves. Just as in *The Ring and the Book* we have the complete Browning, so in *The Ring of the Nibelung* we have the complete Wagner; and the complete Wagner, so seen, is something at which the world still remains astounded.

## CHAPTER VII

### “TRISTAN AND ISOLDE”

WE have already seen how the two central concepts of *The Ring*—the adoration of the unfettered individual and the doctrine of freedom in love—grew directly out of the circumstances of Wagner's own life. In every work of his we have yet examined, in fact, we see, first and foremost, just Wagner himself, the tragedy always being the particular tragedy of which he felt himself to be the victim at the moment. Within the last few months we have been enabled, by the publication of Wagner's letters to Frau Wesendonk, to understand the genesis of his next great work,<sup>1</sup> *Tristan and Isolde*. Hitherto there has been a gap in our knowledge of the real Wagner. We

<sup>1</sup> The reader will, of course, remember that *The Ring* was not written all at once, and followed by *Tristan* and *The Mastersingers*, but that the two latter works were composed between 1857 and 1867, *The Ring* being suspended during these years. See the Chronological Table.

have seen him to be exceedingly unhappy with his wife in the early 'fifties; then the story has always been renewed with the dawning passion for Liszt's daughter Cosima about 1864.<sup>1</sup> The publication of the Wesendonk letters lifts the veil from the intervening years. In the Wagner biographies there are only the briefest of references to the Wesendonks, and even these references are mostly misleading. The story is too long to be told here, but one or two points need to be brought out in order to make the *Tristan* epoch comprehensible.

Otto Wesendonk was a wealthy merchant whose wife Mathilde was a great admirer of Wagner; and in the biographies we are told that having built a gorgeous villa at Zürich in 1857, Wesendonk let Wagner have a small cottage standing close by it—known as "The Refuge." The impression thus conveyed is that the friendship with the Wesendonks dates from 1857,<sup>2</sup> whereas it is clear from Wagner's letter to Mathilde of 21st August 1858 that he had been in love with her *for six years*. They had, in fact, met in 1852, and by 1853, according

<sup>1</sup> She was at that time Von Bülow's wife.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Mr. Finck's *Wagner*, ii. 38.

to Mathilde's own account, had become closely attached to each other. For some years after 1850 Wagner was evidently in a state of raging revolt against his marriage fetters. His one thought after 1852 was Mathilde; to her, for example, he inscribes *The Valkyrie* Prelude in 1854. His poor wife, Minna, was ill with heart disease, and aging terribly; and the sublime egoist could not see that his passion for Frau Wesendonk was adding to his wife's troubles. He really could not understand why he could not be left alone to sip, bee-like, honey from any flower that pleased him. Matters, however, came to a crisis in the summer of 1858; Minna quarrelled with Mathilde, and "The Refuge" had to be abandoned. Minna went away to try a cure for her illness; Wagner went to Venice to dream of Mathilde. It seems as if he had promised Otto not to write to her; so he kept a diary, which he sent to her after many days. This diary contains some of the most passionate outpourings that the love-letters of great men can show. All this time he was engaged on *Tristan*. He conceived the idea of it in 1854, ostensibly under the influence of Schopenhauer, but more probably under that of Mathilde; certainly

not a bar of it was written that is not full of her, as his diary clearly shows.

About 1857 Frau Wesendonk wrote *Fünf Gedichte* (Five Poems) which were set by Wagner for soprano voice and piano. Two of these—*Im Treibhaus* (In the Hothouse) and *Träume* (Dreams)—he calls “Studies for *Tristan and Isolde*.” Much of the writing in the Five Poems is not at all interesting, and popular opinion has been right in deciding that “Dreams” is the best of the lot. In this there is indeed all the charm and fragrance of *Tristan* itself; Wagner made use of it afterwards for a portion of the great duet in the second Act. The Prelude to the third Act is anticipated in the song “In the Hothouse.”

*Tristan*, with its simplicity of outline and concentration of incident, must have been a relief to Wagner’s mind after the tortuous intrigue and crowded canvas of *The Ring*. It is, on the whole, his most perfect work, because its very simplicity makes the problem of musical form much easier to him here than it is in the tetralogy. The poem is written in the first and last place for association with music. The emotions are generally indicated in the

fewest possible words, the music being left to expand these mere hints into a volume.

As the last notes of the Prelude die away, the curtain rises and shows a pavilion on the deck of a vessel. Isolde is on a couch, her face buried in the cushions. Near her is her maid, Brangaene. Later on, by the pulling of a curtain, the whole length of the ship becomes visible. Seamen, knights, and attendants are seen; a little apart from them sits Tristan, absorbed in thought; at his feet reclines his trusty servant Kurvenal. Isolde is in an angry mood. She sends Brangaene to bid Tristan appear before her; he refuses on the plea that he dare not leave the helm. Again Isolde breaks out ragingly. We gather that she is the daughter of the King of Ireland. Her cousin and fiancé, Morold, had gone to Cornwall to levy tribute of King Marke, but was slain by Tristan, who sent back the head to Ireland. Tristan also was wounded, and went to Ireland to be healed by the magic arts taught to Isolde by her mother. He concealed his identity under the name of Tantris; but Isolde knew him by the fact that into a notch in his sword there fitted a splinter from the head of Morold. In her anger she

meant to slay Tristan, but the sick man looked up at her, and his glance softening her heart she nursed him back to health. When he reached Cornwall he persuaded Marke, who was a childless widower, to marry the lovely Isolde. Marke sent him to bring back this peerless bride; and we now see them returning on the ship together. Isolde's anger is due to the fact that while she loves Tristan, he has designed her for the bride of King Marke, and that consequently he avoids her while on the ship. Brangaene reminds her of the potion her mother had given her, that will secure for her the love of any man who may drink it. The theme associated with this love-potion has two main parts <sup>1</sup>—

No. 52.



<sup>1</sup> No. 52 is usually styled the "Desire" motive; but in this case, as in so many others, we have not space in the present volume to make an elaborate sub-division of the motives. Here it is best to correlate the theme of desire with that of the potion itself.





But Isolde replies that she has a better draught—a poison that brings death—



The ship is nearing the land ; once more she sends for Tristan, meanwhile bidding her maid fill a goblet from the flask that contains the death-draught. This time Tristan obeys her command ; he enters silently, he and Isolde looking at each other to the accompaniment of music whose enormous concentration reveals the strain under which they are labouring. She recalls the story of Morold's death and Tristan's illness, and regrets having saved the latter's life ; whereupon he hands her his sword, bidding her slay him. Endeavouring to hide her real feelings, she invites him to drink an ending to their strife, and the trembling Brangaene prepares the draught. Just then the voices

of the sailors strike in ; the ship is almost at the shore. Isolde hurriedly hands the cup to Tristan, who by now has understood that it means death, which he too will gladly welcome. He drinks part of the potion ; Isolde takes the cup from him and drains the remainder. But the orchestra, by giving out the strain of the love-potion (No. 52) tells us that Brangaene has changed the flasks, and that it is not the draught of death but the draught of love they have drunk together. Gradually their passion overpowers them ; they sink tremblingly into each other's arms. For one brief moment they give themselves up to the delirium of their blood ; then the ship touches the shore, and they are shaken from their dreams by the cries of the knights and sailors, acclaiming the King, who has come out to receive his bride.

The second Act commences with a passionate Prelude, depicting the impatience with which Isolde, in the garden before her chamber, is awaiting her lover. It is a lovely summer night. A royal hunt is in progress ; horns are heard hailing and answering each other. Isolde, anxious for Tristan to come, believes the hunt to be farther off than it really is ; Brangaene

warns her that spies are lurking about, one knight in particular—Melot, an enemy of Tristan—being greatly to be feared. Indeed, Brangaene believes the hunt to be only a scheme of Melot's by means of which he may trap the lovers. But the impatient Isolde will not listen; she gives the signal to Tristan by extinguishing the torch that burns at the door. All this makes one of the most entrancing scenes ever put upon the stage. Through it runs a lovely theme—

No. 55.



while later on, as Isolde's passion grows upon her, there comes another theme—

No. 56.



that is of the utmost importance later on. Never have the enchantment and mystery of the night, with the vague desires—half pleasure and half pain—that are born in it, been painted with such ravishing loveliness.

Brangaene, greatly troubled, leaves the scene at the extinction of the torch ; and Isolde awaits impatiently the coming of her lover. A repetition of the Prelude to the Act is heard ; this grows more and more passionate, until Tristan rushes in, and the pair embrace madly. To the long duet that follows, no words of man could do justice. It is the very delirium of love, an Oriental paradise seen in a *hachisch* dream. The whole gamut of the lovers' ecstasy is ranged through — satisfaction, madness, languor, the joy of life, the longing for death. Just as it rises to a height where one forgets, with Tristan and Isolde, that a real world anywhere exists, the sentinel Brangaene utters a piercing shriek, and King Marke enters, followed by Melot and other courtiers. The night of love is over ; day has come with all its unkind light and crude reality. Isolde, overcome with shame, averts her face ; Tristan tries to hide her with his mantle from the profane gaze of the newcomers ; the orchestra plays fondly with some of the themes of the great love-scene, as if loth to leave them.

Melot eagerly seeks the commendation of the King for having thus surprised the lovers ; but the broken-hearted Marke, in

a long monologue, mourns less his own betrayal than the fall from honour of his cherished Tristan. But Tristan, shaken as he is with pity for the King, has no place in his soul for any one but Isolde. His mind coursing back to the theme of their duet—the consoling beauty and peace of night and the garish reality of day—he asks her once more to accompany him to the land where no sunlight ever gleams. As she consents, and Tristan bends down and kisses her softly, Melot starts forward furiously with drawn sword. A short scene of passion follows, ending with Melot stabbing Tristan, who sinks into the arms of his trusty Kurvenal.

Before the curtain rises on the third Act we hear in the orchestra a most mournful version of the love-potion theme (No. 52). It is now turned to utter weariness and pain ; we grasp the significance of it when the opened scene shows us the wounded Tristan, lying on a couch in the garden of his castle in Brittany, that overlooks the sea. Kurvenal, who has conveyed him here, bends over him with an air of anxious love. A shepherd has been set to watch for the coming of Isolde’s ship. He plays on the cor anglais one of the strangest,

saddest melodies ever invented—a melody that seems to have been distilled from all the tears that man in his pain has ever shed—

No. 57.



It wakens Tristan, who feebly inquires of Kurvenal how he came here. Gradually the fever mounts in his veins; he wants Isolde, and he curses the cruel day whose light fills his brain with madness. His disordered fancy still sees Isolde waiting for the darkness of night, that he may go to her. To comfort him, Kurvenal tells him he has sent for her, and that her ship is even now on the sea. The wounded man thanks him, in tones that pierce the heart with compassion. Then, as Tristan works himself up to a frenzy of anticipation, the mournful tune of the shepherd is heard again, signifying that the ship is not yet in sight; and Tristan sinks back in profound melancholy. Sadly he reflects on his unhappy plight, the shepherd's melody

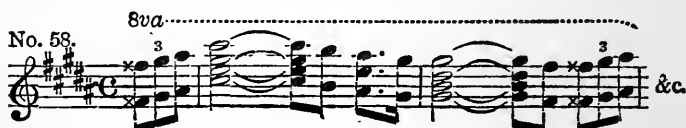
weaving itself in and out among his song in a way that baffles description,

... “Like some grave mighty thought threading  
a dream . . . ”

intoxicating the senses with its beauty and its sadness.

Finally, after Tristan's fevered brain has once more conjured up a vision of Isolde, a brighter tune from the shepherd announces that her ship is at last in sight. Tristan's delirium overmasters him; he tears the bandage from his wound, rises from his couch, and staggers forward to meet her as she enters. The effort is too much for him; reminiscences of their great love-duet are heard, but they are pathetically feeble and halting; and Tristan, as he dies, can only raise his eyes to her and murmur her name. It would be better for the end of the opera to come now, but Wagner saw fit to interpolate another scene. The shepherd informs Kurvenal that another ship has arrived; it contains King Marke with Brangaene and the knights. Kurvenal barricades the gate, and when Melot enters, sets on him and slays him; he himself, madly refusing to make peace, is afterwards killed and dies at Tristan's feet, groping

in his blindness for his master's hand. Marke's mission, however, has been a pacific one—to pardon the lovers and unite them in marriage, for Brangaene has told him the story of the potion. But Isolde hears nothing of what goes on around her. In a state of sibylline ecstasy that makes her oblivious of the outer world she sings her *Liebestod* over the dead body of her hero. It is mostly built up out of the material of their love-duet; one great phrase, founded on No. 55—

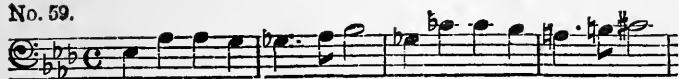


dominates everything towards the end, though the last word of all is given to the theme of the love-potion (No. 52).

The Prelude and the final *Liebestod* are frequently played together as a concert piece. The Prelude throws into simple and strong relief some three or four of the themes connected with the love of Tristan and Isolde; it mounts to one huge climax, then dies away in exhaustion, and is at once followed by the *Liebestod*, which commences thus, with a phrase from the duet of the second Act—



No. 59.



Many people prefer the final scene played in this way as a purely orchestral piece, without the voice. It is quite certain that here, as in many other places in the score, the original conception was orchestral, and the voice has been fitted to it, as in *The Ring*, in the best way the composer could manage. This, indeed, is the one serious flaw in all the work of Wagner's prime; it is an error which a later opera-writer of genius may possibly avoid. But it is, perhaps, the only serious flaw in *Tristan and Isolde*, which as a whole is without comparison in music. Everything was in its favour; the simplicity of outline and economy of incident of the story allow full play to the expansive, expressive power of music; the tense, compact verse is most cunningly adapted to the same end; the strong personal, autobiographic impulse that went to the making of the work happily came to Wagner just at the time when his system was at its most nervous pitch and his purely musical powers were at their fullest. *Tristan and Isolde* thus became

the ideal lovers, the incarnation of all the forces that have glowed in the blood of men and women since the foundations of sex were laid. Wagner's instinct rightly told him that this was not only the finest thing he had yet done, but something that the present generation of men will not see surpassed. Nowhere is his thought, regarded as mere cerebration, so intense and so continuous; while the formal handling is more sure, more admirable, than people had previously thought to be possible in opera. Not only is it finished down to the minutest detail, chiselled and polished like some delicate piece of metal-work, but it is bound by its consummate use of the leading motive into a whole that hangs together like a living organism, through whose arteries there flows one continuous stream of blood. Von Bülow hit off this characteristic of *Tristan* very happily in the remark that the thematic elaboration is "as lucid as it is logical." We get, in fact, independently of the emotional pleasure of the themes themselves, an unspeakable pleasure from the sheer logic of their handling—the logic of the Beethoven symphony at its best, the joy of witnessing a master-weaver making a complex, har-

monious tissue out of a handful of simple threads. The same ease of structure-building, applied on a more extended scale to the genial story of *The Mastersingers*, was next to give the world an incomparable operatic comedy.

## CHAPTER VIII

### “ THE MASTERSINGERS ”

THE MASTERSINGERS is set in the Germany of the sixteenth century, when the art of song had passed out of the hands of the aristocratic troubadours and minnesingers into those of the workers of the town, who formed themselves into guilds for the cultivation of the art. The most prominent of these towns was Nuremberg, which has been made especially notable by the work of the poetical shoemaker, Hans Sachs.

The first Act opens in St. Catherine's Church in Nuremberg, during the service. In the last row of seats are Eva—daughter of a wealthy goldsmith named Pogner—and her maid Magdalena; near by them is a young knight, Walther von Stolzing, who gazes continually at Eva. Interspersed with the chorale we hear fragments of tenderer music, that speak of the love

growing up between the pair. After the church has emptied, Walther declares himself to Eva, but is told that she is to be given as bride, on the morrow, to the man who shall be victor at the song-contest—though she assures him that this man shall be himself or no one. A number of apprentices enter to prepare the scene for the Mastersingers ; meanwhile Walther seeks information about the rules of singing from David, the apprentice of Hans Sachs. David expounds them to him in full, with great volubility—how he must be both poet and singer, and the prescribed pattern upon which his song must be constructed ; when he sings, a marker will score upon a board the number of times he has transgressed the rules, eight offences of this kind being enough to disqualify him.

By this time the marker's box and all the other apparatus have been put up by the apprentices. While Walther muses moodily on what he has heard, the Mastersingers keep coming in. First we see Pogner and Beckmesser, the town clerk—an ugly old pedant who is in love with Eva ; he tries in vain to induce Pogner to alter one article in the conditions of the contest—that Eva may reject the winner

if she likes. The other Mastersingers being all assembled, one of them—Kothner the baker—calls the roll, after which Pogner announces the contest of song on the morrow, with Eva as the prize.<sup>1</sup> A proposal by Sachs that the people shall have a voice in the matter is scouted by the other Masters as a dangerous step towards the vulgarisation of their art. Walther now desires to be admitted to their guild. To the question, "What Master taught you?" he replies, in a lovely air, that he learnt from the old singer, Walther von der Vogelweide, and from the music of the woods, and that, if they will allow him, he will try to compose a mastersong. The freedom and romance of his singing are rather beyond the comprehension of the old burghers, but they let him begin his song, Beckmesser being the marker. The apprentices bring out the Tablature, from which Kothner reads the rules: a "section" is made of two stanzas, both set to the same melody; each line must have an end-rhyme; then must come the "after-song," with a new melody; and so on. It is almost incredible with what freedom and

<sup>1</sup> This is the music so often heard on the concert stage under the title of "Pogner's Address."

beauty Wagner has handled this episode, which at first sight seems absolutely alien to the spirit of music.

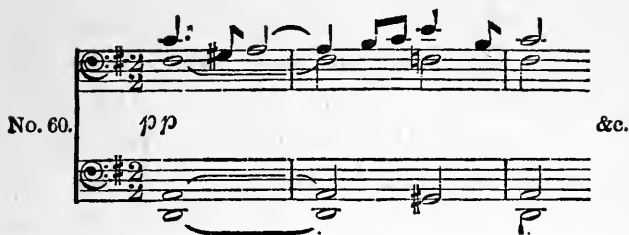
Walther now bursts out into his song—an impassioned lyric in praise of Spring and of youthful love. He is interrupted by Beckmesser emerging from the marker’s box and showing the board literally covered with chalk marks—so many times has the young enthusiast infringed the rules. One Master alone speaks up for the confused knight—Hans Sachs, who says that though the song may not have been strictly orthodox in form, it was still good ; it was new, perhaps, but not confused. He warns them that they must be careful about applying their rules to things they really will not fit, and recommends that Walther shall be allowed to continue. The Masters are against it, and the apprentices deride the knight ; but in spite of them all he sings on in a fine frenzy. He is declared “ rejected and out-sung ; ” he leaves the singer’s seat with a contemptuous gesture, and the meeting breaks up in some confusion, Sachs alone, though deeply discouraged, still pondering over the song he has just heard.

The second Act shows a street, with Pogner’s large house on one side and the

smaller house of Hans Sachs on the other. It is a lovely summer evening ; David and the other apprentices are closing the windows of the various houses. Magdalena appears, and is told by David of the sad end of Walther's singing. There is a good deal of boisterous gaiety among the apprentices, chiefly at David's expense, which is ended by Sachs dispersing them and going with David into the workshop. Then Pogner and Eva enter, and, seating themselves in front of their house, discuss for a moment the contest of the morrow. Eva next learns from Magdalena of Walther's failure and resolves to go to Sachs for fuller news.

When they have entered Pogner's house, Sachs comes from his room into the workshop and sends David away for the night. He sits on the stool at his door and tries to work, but cannot ; the beauty of the evening and the scent of the elder tree before his door have penetrated his soul, and he is haunted by the memory of Walther's song. So the big-hearted, deeply poetical man sits and muses tenderly upon it all. A snatch of the knight's song comes out every now and then—





It speaks to the open, natural mind of Sachs of the beauty of nature as seen by the eye of an ardent young poet ; he is superior to the narrow pedantic views of the other Masters.

Eva now quietly slips up to him. A charming dialogue ensues, in which she gradually draws from Sachs the story of Walther's failure, while he, by artfully appearing unfriendly to the young man, betrays her into showing her love for him. She leaves him in a temper ; whereupon he closes his door so far that only a gleam of light remains visible, he himself being almost hidden.

While Magdalena is trying to get Eva into the house, Walther enters. He implores Eva to fly with him, but they are interrupted by the old watchman making his rounds. She goes into the house, and soon reappears in Magdalena's dress, ready for the elopement ; Walther has the horses

ready outside the city gates. But Sachs has heard the dialogue, and resolves to stop the foolish plan of the lovers. He opens the door and thus illumines the street, making it impossible for the pair to step forward into the light. Just then, too, the sound of a lute being tuned is heard ; it is Beckmesser, come to serenade Eva and so steal a march on his rivals ; and as Sachs has now thought of a new scheme, he withdraws his light again, and brings his work-bench to the door. Walther is for slaying Beckmesser, but is restrained by Eva. The lovers now keep in the background and watch what follows.

Sachs begins singing and hammering loudly ; his song—about Eva in Paradise—suggests to Eva that he is making game of them all. To Beckmesser's protests he replies that they are Beckmesser's own boots he is working at, which must be finished by the morrow. Accordingly he cannot stop hammering, but he is willing to act in this way as marker during Beckmesser's serenade. The old pedant goes through the delicious musical foolery of the serenade to some one at the window who, he thinks, is Eva, but who is in reality Magdalena in her mistress's clothes. Sachs goads him to

fury by his incessant tapping on the sole of the shoe. At length the noise arouses David and the townsfolk, who gradually come into the street. David, seeing some one serenading Magdalena, belabours him with a stick. A scene of wild tumult follows, everybody quarrelling with every one else; finally Eva is taken by her father, and Walther by Sachs, and the crowd disappears as the old watchman comes in again with his quaint song and his ludicrous blast on the ox-horn. The scene as a whole is humorous, though here and there it degenerates into the commonplace and suggests the pantomime rally.

In the Prelude to the third Act, Hans Sachs is portrayed for us in a new light. (He, in fact, and not Walther, is the real hero of the drama.) In the third verse of his cobbling song in the second Act, there was heard a phrase which, as Wagner says, “expresses the bitter moan of the resigned man, who presents to the world a strong and serene countenance.” This now serves to open the Prelude to the third Act—

## No. 61.



It dies away in tones of resignation ; then  
 “as it were from a distance, the horns  
 give out the solemn chant with which Sachs  
 greets Luther and the Reformation ”—

## No. 62.



which becomes of importance later on in the Act. “Then the strings take up again, very tenderly, a single snatch of the true cobbler’s song, as if the man had turned his eyes upward, away from his daily toil, and lost himself in sweet and tender dreams. The horns, with greater fulness of tone, continue the Master’s hymn, with which Hans Sachs, when he enters the scene of the Festival, is greeted by the whole of the people of Nuremberg in a unanimous and thunderous outburst. Next enters again the first motive of the strings (No. 61), with its large expression of the emotions

that move a profoundly thoughtful soul; now, calmed and appeased, it attains the extreme serenity of a tender and holy resignation.”

The curtain rises and shows Sachs reading. David apologises for his conduct of the preceding night, and, informing his master that this is St. John's Day (his name-day), urges him to marry again. When David has left, Sachs' sad reflections on life find expression in the noble air “Wahn! Wahn! ueberall Wahn!” (“Mad! Mad! All the world's mad.”) Walther enters, and there follows perhaps the most profoundly human and poetical scene in all Wagner's work—the old man bestowing his rich and ripe experience of life upon the young one. Being urged to try to compose a master-song, Walther narrates a lovely dream he has had, Sachs, greatly moved by its beauty, noting it down on paper.

They leave the room in order to dress for the Festival, and Beckmesser limps in, evidently in great pain from his last night's cudgelling. He is trying to think of a new song, when his eyes fall on the manuscript just left by Sachs, which, he instantly supposes, the cobbler himself means to sing

at the contest. He furtively slips it into his pocket. Sachs, on his return, becomes aware of this, but makes Beckmesser a present of the song for his own use. This gladdens the town clerk's heart, as he is too battered to compose a new one himself in time for the Festival.

After he has left, Eva comes in to have one of her shoes altered. While Sachs is attending to it Walther enters, and stands spellbound at the sight of her beauty. He now sings the third verse of his dream-song, at the end of which Eva bursts into passionate tears and falls sobbing on Sachs' breast. Loveliness is piled upon loveliness, till the scene ends with the entry of David and Magdalena, and the five voices blend in a glorious quintette.

A curtain hides the scene for a moment, while pompous festive music is heard ; then we see an open meadow near Nuremberg, crowded with the burghers and their families in holiday dress, all enjoying themselves mightily. Choruses are sung by the representatives of various trades ; there are dances of the apprentices and the girls ; then the Mastersingers march in to the accompaniment of their splendid theme—

## No. 63.



A great reception is given to Sachs when he enters, every one joining in the superb chorus, "Awake, the dawn is nigh" (No. 62), the words of which are by the historical Sachs. The contest then begins. Beckmesser flounders woefully through the stolen song, distorting it past recognition, until he is laughed from the singer's seat. In his rage he throws the manuscript away, declaring Sachs to be its real author. Sachs picks it up and disclaims the authorship of it, but says it is a good poem, only needing proper singing. He who can render it adequately will thereby reveal himself as the true author of it. Walther then steps forward and sings his glorious Prize Song—a modification of the previous dream-song—and wins Eva as his bride. They offer to make him a Mastersinger, but this he refuses; the wise old Sachs, however, takes him by the hand and preaches a good sermon on art and artists and the reverence

due to them. All unite in the apotheosis of Hans Sachs, and the curtain falls.

Originally conceived as a humorous pendant to *Tannhäuser*, *The Mastersingers* really dates from a much later epoch. It is, perhaps, not difficult to account for its abundant good humour. *Tristan* must have acted as a purgative to Wagner's spirit, ridding it, by the very violence of its passion, of most of its anguish and despair, and leaving it in the happy, resigned mood that accompanies convalescence after a long and painful illness. Later on, the friendship of King Ludwig was like a bath of sunlight to him. Written under influences of this kind, it is no wonder that *The Mastersingers* is the incarnation of composed beauty, of serene wisdom, of deep and tender reflection upon life. One may take a little exception at times to the treatment of Beckmesser and David, as passing beyond comedy into farce; but on the whole the opera strikes the right note. The antithesis of *Tristan* in every other respect, it is like that work in its easy yet unapproachable mastery, its sure, sustained flight into a tract of the upper air whither no one else can follow. As it is the most broadly human in subject of all



Wagner's works, so the music shows his deep humanity at its finest and tenderest. On the technical side one stands amazed at the extraordinary fluency of inspiration and freedom of handling; Wagner plays like a Titan in sport with his huge material. And *The Mastersingers* has one commanding excellence: it smells of the good brown earth and real life, untainted by any tedious metaphysic. These very human men and women are much more precious to us than the personified abstractions that he shows himself so fond of elsewhere. We want no pseudo-philosophical commentaries on *Tristan* and *The Mastersingers*; they can be pressed into the service of no economic or sociological theory.<sup>1</sup> This is not the least of their merits, that they are artworks content to stand or fall solely by the amount of sheer art that is in them.

The Overture is the most elaborate thing of the kind that Wagner had written since the *Tannhäuser* Overture. The characters of the opera fall under three main types—

<sup>1</sup> Much second-hand Schopenhauerism has been read into *Tristan*, but only by the fancy of the wild Wagnerians. One who knew *Tristan* only through the opera itself might go to his grave in blissful unconsciousness that Wagner had ever heard the name of Schopenhauer.

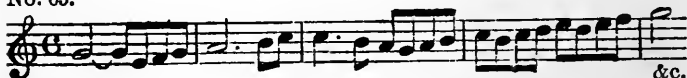
the pompous, sturdy old Mastersingers, the gay, irresponsible apprentices, who are a kind of parody on their graver elders, and the young lovers. It is the themes representing these three types that Wagner has woven into the superb tissue of the Overture. First comes the grandiose theme of the Mastersingers (No. 63). This is broken in upon for a moment by a suggestion of the tender world of romance in which the lovers live; but a return is soon made from this little personal episode to the painting of the big, active life of the town, in a stirring procession march—

No. 64.



which terminates in a magnificent outburst, commencing thus—

No. 65.

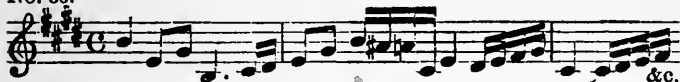


meant to symbolise "the artistic brotherhood in its ideal sense."

A little transitional matter brings us to

the love-episode, taken from the end of Walther's prize song—

No. 66.



which, after being worked up passionately, is succeeded abruptly by the theme of the apprentices. This is an impudent, perky imitation of the massive theme of the Mastersingers—

No. 67. *molto staccato*.



Later on we get a fine contrapuntal combination of Nos. 66, 64, and 63, and the huge mass of tone slowly makes its irresistible way to a dignified and glorious conclusion.

## CHAPTER IX

### MISCELLANEOUS WORKS

WAGNER did not shine as a piano writer, and he wrote commendably little for that instrument. The student may get his early sonata in B flat (dedicated to his Leipzig teacher Weinlig), just to see how little musical originality there was in Wagner at the age of eighteen. Everything in it is quite orthodox — the typical work of the good young man who has been well taught, and told that he cannot improve on what those great men Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven have done. It is decent, well-behaved music of its kind, but contains nothing in any way remarkable. The much later Albumblatt in E flat is necessarily more distinctive; but even here one really does not see the true Wagner. This, in fact, is true of all his non-dramatic or non-orchestral writings, in spite of an occasional touch of charm that may be met with in them.

The early symphony in C was for many years regarded as lost. The orchestral parts were found in Dresden in 1872, and from these Anton Seidl reconstructed the score. It was played privately to the Wagner circle a few months before the composer's death ; then it slumbered again until 1887, when it was given in sundry concert halls. A publisher could not be found for it, however, and it is exceedingly unlikely that it will ever be revived. Speaking from memory of the 1887 performances, one can only say that it showed a good deal of unexpected strength, though it was clearly made in the factory of Beethoven.<sup>1</sup>

The *Siegfried Idyll* is a charming personal document—the expression of the joy and consolation Wagner found in his home at Tribschen. Cosima von Bülow had been divorced from her husband in 1869, and married Wagner on 25th August 1870. Their son Siegfried had been born on 6th June 1869. A letter of Wagner to Frau Wille, of 25th June 1870, gives expression

<sup>1</sup> Wagner himself has given an account of the work in his article, "On the Production of a Youthful Symphony" (1882). A copious analysis of it, with musical illustrations is to be had in Oscar Eichberg's *Richard Wagner's Symphonie in C dur*.

to his happy mood. "She has borne to me a wonderfully beautiful and vigorous boy, whom I could boldly call 'Siegfried'; he is now growing, together with my work, and gives me a new, long life, which at last has attained a meaning. Thus we get along without the world, from which we had retired entirely." The self-centred, snugly-cocooned home-life of this epoch of sunny days finds voice in that apotheosis of the cradle, the beautiful and tender *Siegfried Idyll*. The work is scored for a small orchestra—strings, one flute, one oboe, two clarionets, one bassoon, two horns, and one trumpet; and, with the exception of a sweet old German cradle-song (No. 69) the themes upon which it is constructed are all taken from *Siegfried*. First comes No. 45, then a theme not previously quoted—

No. 68.



then the cradle-song—

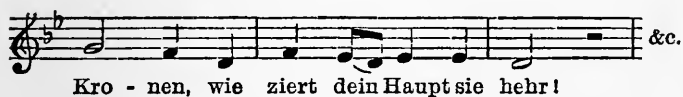
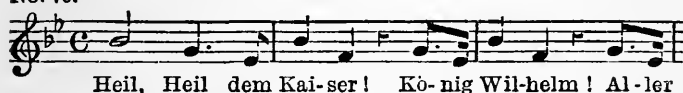
No. 69.



then No. 46 (in a slightly modified form) and finally No. 47.

Wagner wrote three big marches that are constantly played. The *Kaisermarsch* was meant to celebrate the German victories of 1870 and the election of the King of Prussia as German Emperor. It is a broad and pompous piece of work, and sounds magnificent in its full, rich scoring. A great martial theme comes out first in the whole orchestra, which in its essential form runs thus—

## No. 70.



(Wagner meant the melody, at its final appearance, to be sung by the audience to the above words.) Then the B flat and F which are so prominent in this quotation appear as a ground-bass, over which the wood-wind sing the second subject—

## No. 71.



immediately upon the conclusion of which we hear, *fortissimo*, the melody of Luther's chorale, "Ein fester Burg ist unser Gott." Fine play is made with these three themes, and the gorgeous palace of tone comes to an end with a triumphant enunciation of No. 70, with its verbal accompaniment.

The *Huldigungsmarsch* (Homage March) is of a less imposing and more intimate cast. It is Wagner's expression of gratitude to and love for the young King Ludwig II. of Bavaria, who plays so romantic a part in the composer's life. Wagner was always careful to keep his marches broad and massy, and the thematic structure of the *Huldigungsmarsch* is exceedingly simple. A brief introductory passage—

## No. 72.



is followed by a fanfare in the brass, and



this by the chief theme of the march, given first of all to the wood-wind—

No. 73.



These three themes constitute all the thematic material of the march. It may be mentioned that the *Huldigungsmarsch* was written by Wagner for a military band; the later version for full orchestra was begun by the composer and completed by Raff.

Though Wagner made no pretence of a display of technical cleverness in his marches, being content to fill his canvas with two or three heroic musical figures set in surroundings that showed them up to the best advantage, he usually succeeds in making quite an imposing and satisfying effect within the limits of the *genre* he had in view. His one failure is the *Centennial March*, written in 1876 for the Philadelphia Celebration of the American Declaration of Independence. The Americans made rather a bad bargain when they paid him £1000 for it. All Wagner's march-writing ran in

much the same groove, and in the three main themes of the *Centennial March*—

No. 74.



No. 76.

Trumpets.



there is clearly an attempt to get the usual ample atmosphere and broad melodic swing. But the work is never really alive, though here and there it almost persuades us that it is becoming so.

The most commanding achievement of Wagner in purely instrumental music is the fine *Faust Overture*, written in Paris in 1840, and recast in 1855. Liszt in 1852 remarked that "the woman was wanting" in the work. Wagner admitted it, explaining that his original plan had been to write a *Faust Symphony*, the first move

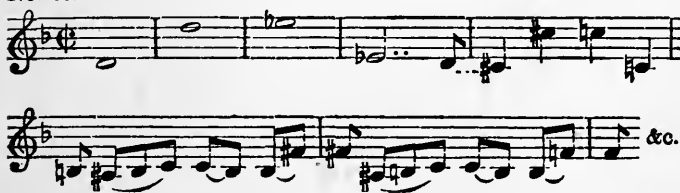
ment — the present Overture — depicting “the ‘Solitary Faust,’ longing, despairing, cursing.” A vision of the feminine indeed hovers round him, but only as an “insufficient image of his longing which he destroys in his despair.” The real Gretchen was to have entered in the second movement. This scheme, however, was never completed.

Wagner prefixes to his score a quotation from Goethe’s *Faust*, which runs thus in Sir Theodore Martin’s translation—

“The God who in my breast abides,  
Through all its depths can stir my soul ;  
My every faculty He sways and guides,  
Yet can He not what lies without control ;  
And thus, my life as by a load oppress,  
I long for death, existence I detest.”

The main theme of the Overture is first heard in full in the *Allegro molto agitato*, in this form—

No. 77.



The work commences, however, with a sombre introduction—*largo sostenuto*—based chiefly on this theme, the figure shown in the sixth and seventh bars being used to particularly fine effect. Contrast is given by a subject that comes out in chords in the wood-wind—



A momentary return to the heavy mood of the opening ends the Introduction, whereupon the *Allegro* begins with the theme quoted as No. 77. After full musical and psychological elaboration of this, the second subject enters—



representing Faust's "sweet uncomprehended yearning." But in this, and again in the development of No. 78, which succeeds it, we hear the pained cry of Faust's unsatisfied heart (bars 6 and 7 of No. 77).

The gentler emotions are gradually submerged in bitterness of spirit ; even when the consolatory No. 79 makes its reappearance it cannot contend against the floods of "longing, despairing, and cursing" that surge around it ; and the Overture ends with the riddle-like query of the opening bars of No. 77 repeated in still more mournful tones.

The *Faust Overture* is the one composition by Wagner that makes us think it possible he might have become a supremely great musician apart from the theatre. With the exception of Liszt's vast and comprehensive *Faust Symphony*, it is the most convincing of all the purely orchestral settings of the subject.

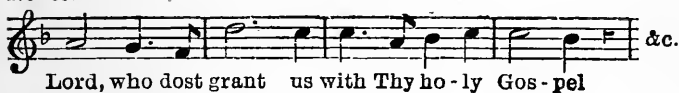
Wagner, while conductor at Dresden, had also become conductor of a choral union in the town, and for a big festival held there in the summer of 1843 he wrote *The Love Feast of the Apostles*—a biblical scene, as he calls it, for men's voices. It begins with the full chorus of disciples greeting each other in the name of Jesus, at the Feast of Pentecost. Then the chorus divides into three choirs, who interpellate each other, mourning the sad condition of the faithful, or offering consolation. They blend again

in an ensemble, "O come, all ye who hunger and are thirsting." Next ensues a dialogue between the apostles—twelve bass voices—and the general body of disciples, whom they exhort to be steadfast under persecution. A foretaste of an effect employed later in *Parsifal* is had when the words "Comfort ye! Lo, I am nigh, and My Spirit is with you!" &c., come down from voices placed on high. To this succeeds another striking passage. Hitherto the music has been entirely vocal, and necessarily of a sombre colour, set as it is for tenors and basses only. Now the orchestra enters for the first time, painting graphically the rushing and roaring of the wind, that accompanies the coming of the spirit of the Lord. The disciples break out into loud cries. The apostles announce their mission of spreading the gospel to the world, and the work ends with a chorus of joy and thanksgiving.

A certain amount of monotony is inevitable in a work of this kind; but apart from that, *The Love Feast of the Apostles* is a sincere and impressive piece of writing, simple and dignified in form and colour, yet containing within itself a great number of *nuances* of expression. It plainly belongs

to the *Tannhäuser-Lohengrin* epoch of Wagner; especially towards the end do we note the tyranny of that rhythmic formula we have so often remarked in his earlier works—

No. 80.



## CHAPTER X

### “ PARSIFAL ”

THE story of Parsifal was occupying Wagner's thoughts in the 'fifties, at the time he was engaged on *Tristan*. It did not, however, come to full fruition until twenty years later ; in this interval Wagner's mind and temperament had undergone profound alterations, motivated, no doubt, by changes in his physical system. Nietzsche loathed Parsifal because it lauded chastity ; and the sexless atmosphere of the work has given rise to much psychiatric discussion in Germany. We are hardly concerned, however, with this aspect of the matter here.

The events anterior to *Parsifal*, which are communicated to us during the drama itself, are as follows. The Holy Grail—the cup used at the Last Supper—is in the possession of the knights of the Grail, whose castle is at Montsalvat, in Spain. When Titurel, their leader, is near his end,

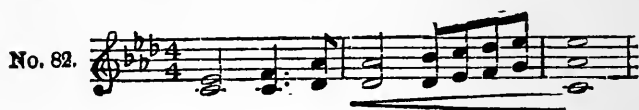


his son Amfortas is appointed to succeed him. Near by lives Klingsor, a magician, who, too sensual and worldly to be made a knight of the Grail, even after mutilating himself, has his revenge in seducing the knights by means of lovely women. Amfortas himself has succumbed to one of these—Kundry, a strange being, who, for laughing at Jesus when He was carrying His cross, has been doomed to wander in torment until some one shall deliver her by his love. During the infatuation of Amfortas, Klingsor takes from him the holy spear—the weapon with which the Roman soldier had pierced the Saviour’s side. With this he gives Amfortas a wound that nothing can heal. The brotherhood thus mourns the loss of the spear, while Amfortas endures, in addition to his physical agony, the mental pain of knowing that all their misfortunes are due to his sin.

The first Act opens in a forest in the domain of the Grail, with a lake in the background. Gurnemanz, an old but vigorous knight, and two young esquires, are asleep under a tree. Trombones on the stage give out one of the themes associated with the Grail brotherhood—



followed by another (the well-known Dresden Amen)—



and another—<sup>1</sup>



It is morning, and the music is a call from the Grail-mountain to prayer. After Gurnemanz and the esquires have prayed awhile, two knights enter; and we learn that Amfortas has tried every remedy in vain to find a cure. His sufferings are suggested in a poignant motive—

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<sup>1</sup> No. 81 has more particular reference to the Love-Feast of the knights; No. 82 represents the Grail itself; No. 83 symbolises Faith.

No. 84.



At the command of Gurnemanz, the esquires go towards the lake to prepare the bath for the King; then a horse is seen flying madly along, bearing Kundry, who soon afterwards appears. Her hair is long, black, and disordered; her dress is fastened with a girdle of snakeskins; her eyes are now wild and blazing, now fixed and dead. Her motive reveals the anguish and unrest of her character—

No. 85.



She gives Gurnemanz a small crystal flask, containing a balsam for Amfortas, who is now brought in in a litter. His bath somewhat refreshes him; while he is away, Gurnemanz tells the esquires the story of Klingsor and Amfortas, and how the King

has been told that one alone can heal him  
—“By pity enlightened, the guileless fool;  
wait for him, my chosen tool!”—

No. 86.



Just then a commotion is heard by the lake; a sacred wild swan, shot by an arrow, flutters forward and dies. The slayer is Parsifal, who is brought in by the knights and esquires. His motive is given out by the orchestra—

No. 87.



He is ignorant of having done anything wrong; but Gurnemanz reads him a lecture,

in which we hear the voice of Wagner himself, the life-long lover of animals. Ultimately Parsifal's emotions are wrought upon; he breaks his bow in pieces and throws the arrows from him. He can give Gurnemanz no information about himself; but Kundry, who has all this time been crouching uneasily by the side of the esquires, says he is the son of Gamuret, who perished in battle, and that his mother, to save him from a similar death, brought him up in the desert, strange to arms, and ignorant of all things. Kundry tells him his mother is dead; in his grief he tries to strangle her, but is restrained by Gurnemanz. He is filled with pity for the youth, and while Kundry crawls behind a thicket to sleep—being called away, as the orchestra explains, by Klingsor — whose motive runs thus—

No. 88.



Gurnemanz resolves to take Parsifal to the castle, in the hope that he may prove to be the appointed redeemer.

The scene gradually changes, so that they appear to be constantly walking on; in time they find themselves in the Hall of the Grail. The Knights enter and seat themselves at the tables; their voices blend from time to time with those of youths and boys, ranged at various heights in the dome. Amfortas is brought in on his couch, and, urged by the voice of old Titurel, at last uncovers the Grail, though this act, which gives renewed strength to them all, adds also to his sufferings. His music here is among the most poignant that Wagner ever wrote; one great phrase in particular—Amfortas' appeal to the Saviour for deliverance—

No. 89.



goes through one like a blade. While he bends before the cup, and the voices float down from the height, complete darkness spreads over the hall ; suddenly a ray of light shoots from the Grail, diffusing a soft lustre all around. Amfortas waves the cup about gently, blessing the wine and bread ; it is restored to its shrine, the daylight returns, and the knights partake solemnly of the Holy Supper. Amfortas refrains from it ; his wound bursts out afresh, and he is carried from the Hall, followed by the others. At his last cry of anguish, Parsifal has clutched at his own heart, and stands petrified. Gurnemanz, angry with him for his apparent stupidity, roughly turns him out of the hall ; and the glorious structure of tone that has been slowly built up is completed by the voices floating down from the dome in brief enunciations of No. 86 and No. 82.

The second Act, after a Prelude based on Nos. 88, 89, and 85, opens in a typical necromantist's chamber in Klingsor's magic castle. He summons Kundry, and orders her to tempt Parsifal, as she had formerly tempted Amfortas. In spite of her loathing of the task, she must obey. Parsifal is approaching, and has already overcome

Klingsor's guards. The magician and his tower disappear, their place being taken by a luxurious magic garden, where lovely damsels arrayed in flowers attempt, in an alluring chorus, the seduction of Parsifal. He looks at them with innocent interest, free from all passion, and is about to fly when Kundry's voice arrests him. She sends away the flower-maidens, and—in the shape of a surpassingly beautiful woman—begins to weave her charms round Parsifal. She gives him a tender and moving picture of his mother's love for him, and of her death from anguish at his absence. Kundry gives him his first kiss of love, that immediately illuminates him. He starts up in terror ; *now* he understands the meaning of Amfortas' wound, which, in sympathy, he feels burning within himself ; he understands, too, the power of passion over the world, and hears the Saviour calling on him to cleanse His polluted sanctuary. As Kundry bends over him seductively, he realises the whole story of Amfortas' fall through her. He spurns her, and in spite of her entreaties remains true to his mission of redeemer ; whereupon she curses him and tells him he shall never find the desired path to Amfortas. Klingsor appears on the



walls and hurls the holy spear at Parsifal—the weapon’s whistling through the air being represented by a long *glissando* of the harps—but it remains floating over his head. He seizes it, makes the sign of the cross—No. 82 sounding out in the orchestra the while—and the castle falls in ruins. To Kundry, who crouches down in terror, he cries, “Thou knowest where we shall meet again,” and then disappears.

In the interval between the second and third Acts, Parsifal, under Kundry’s curse, has long been seeking in vain the home of the Grail. The Prelude passes in review a number of the themes already heard. The scene shows a pleasant landscape, containing a small hermitage. From this comes Gurnemanz, now a very old man. He has heard groans ; proceeding to a thicket, he discovers the seemingly lifeless body of Kundry. He manages to restore her to consciousness ; she has come to resume her service to the knights of the Grail. She goes into the hut to work ; presently a knight approaches in black armour ; No. 87, transposed into the minor, and gloomily coloured, informs us that it is Parsifal. Gurnemanz tells him it is Good Friday, when no man must bear arms in those holy

precincts. Laying aside his armour, he is recognised by Gurnemanz, who tells him in what evil plight the knights have been so long—for Amfortas has refused to take the Grail out of its shrine, or to administer the holy food. Parsifal is overwhelmed with sorrow.<sup>1</sup> They lead him to the edge of the spring; there Kundry bathes his feet and dries them with her hair, while Gurnemanz anoints him with oil and hails him as King. He in turn baptizes Kundry, who bows her head and weeps bitterly. All this takes place to the accompaniment of the “Good Friday Magic” music, an indescribably beautiful piece of tone-painting; Gurnemanz tells Parsifal that the loveliness and calm of nature on this day are an expression of the world’s gratitude to the Redeemer.

Parsifal now follows them, and by a change of scene similar to that in the first Act they emerge into the Hall of the Grail. Solemn and dignified funeral music is heard; knights enter bearing the bier of Titurel, who has died of the privation caused by

<sup>1</sup> There is a beautiful touch in the orchestra when Kundry brings the fainting Parsifal some water, and we hear a modification of the theme to the accompaniment of which she had formerly tried to throw her spells round him.

the withholding of the Grail ; other knights carry the litter of Amfortas, who is once more about to uncover the sacred cup. Again he makes an agonised appeal for deliverance from his torment ; then in madness he uncovers his wound and bids them bury their swords in it. Meanwhile Parsifal, attended by Gurnemanz and Kundry, has entered unperceived ; he stretches out his spear and touches Amfortas' wound, bidding him be whole. He then takes the Grail out of its shrine and prays silently before it. It sheds its radiance over all ; a white dove descends from the dome and hovers over Parsifal ; Kundry, looking up at him, sinks slowly to the ground, dead ; Amfortas and Gurnemanz kneel before Parsifal, who waves the Grail in benediction over the knights, while the voices float down from the dome in waves of tone—“Highest wonder of Salvation ! Redemption to the Redeemer ! ”

The poetic contents of the Prelude to *Parsifal* have been described by Wagner himself in the three words “Love, Faith, Hope.” It is based mainly on Nos. 81, 82, and 83, and tells its own story with perfect clearness.

Opinions differ greatly over the worth of  
VOL. I. N

*Parsifal*. It contains, of course, scenes of deep interest and music of unparalleled beauty, and there is the old power to delineate characters, such as Kundry, that could never have been conceived by any other opera-composer ; but the central idea of the drama—the eternal Wagner-problem of “redemption”—is of only limited human interest, and some of the music undoubtedly points to weakened mental powers. This world of magic and temptation and redemption seems *vieux jeu* now, and will probably become even less and less impressive as time goes on. Still the bulk of the work is profoundly human, and it will live in virtue of the consummate expressiveness of the music at its best. The laments of Amfortas are surely the last word of poor human pain ; nor can one imagine the lovely nature-painting of the work ever losing its deep appeal. But the spectacular element had a firmer hold of Wagner in *Parsifal* than it had ever had ; and he is dependent upon stage-craft to an extent that revolts the modern dramatic sense. On the musical side, the chief fault is the frequent tepidity of the vocal writing. Nowhere else is it so clear that Wagner conceived many of his scenes on the orches-

tra and added the voice-part afterwards ; there are pages of *Parsifal* that make a fine continuous orchestral poem that is only marred by the awkward intrusions of the voice. But when all that can be said against it has been said, it remains an extraordinary creation ; and its dominant note of love and pity for humanity makes it a singularly appropriate ending to the old master's work.

To the question of how much of that work will live for ever, different people will, of course, give different answers. We may be fairly sure, however, that it will first show signs of wear in the very place Wagner himself thought it to be strongest—that is, on the philosophical side. All works of art that preach an evangel have one foot in the grave from the commencement. The world has for the most part already given up caring whether there is or is not a profound lesson to be learned from *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*, although to Wagner himself the lesson in them was quite as important as the art. It is only a matter of a few years more for the world to be sublimely indifferent to the “ philosophy ” of *The Ring* and *Parsifal*. If humanity needs to be in-

structed as to laws and convention, society and the individual, marriage and divorce, chastity and sensuality, the place for that instruction is certainly not the opera. So far as one need concern oneself with all that has been written about Wagner as a leader of thought, one can only say that no real guidance can come from men who, like him, live among the vaguest phantasms of the political and the ethical life. We may as well take pills for earthquakes as suppose that anything will come of maun-dering for ever about sin and redemption, or talking common sentimentalities about woman as the redeemer. If Wagner's dramas are to be taken as tracts, it must be said that their premisses are unsound and their argumentation inconclusive. It is practically certain that in another fifty years no one will care whether they are or are not tracts, and that they will be judged purely and simply as works of art.

On this side again corroding influences are already seen to be at work. To criticise Wagner, be it said at once, is not necessarily to disparage him; only one does no good by blinding one's eyes to the truth. He was a mighty musician, the like of whom the world will not see for many a long year.

For the combination in one organism of beauty of phrase, inexhaustibility of inspiration, and sheer weight and grandeur of conception, there is no one who can well compare with him, except Bach. Other men may surpass him in this point or that, but none of them has so rich a general endowment as he. So far as can be seen at present, his most vulnerable point is that so often called attention to in the preceding pages—the frequent inability to weld the vocal and orchestral parts into a homogeneous substance. He saw his picture as a network of salient musical motives, needing to be handled quasi-symphonically on the orchestra ; this gave coherence and continuity to the orchestral tissue, but often made the vocal part look like an interloper, so crudely, and with such obvious labour, is it plastered upon the orchestral part. It is probable that this is a defect inseparable from opera as he conceived it. It may be taken as an axiom that formal perfection is impossible in any combination of the arts—that where we have two arts co-operating, such as music and poetry, there must be times when a perfect compromise between them is unattainable, when one of them will come too far into the fore-

ground and push the other too far back. This is certainly the case in the Wagnerian music-drama. There are times when the story has to be carried on and made intelligible by means of words so essentially unimaginative that they do not take kindly to musical treatment; there are other moments when the music alone carries the burden so easily and so surely that the words attached to it are almost superfluous.

It cannot be said, then, that he achieved his "unitarian art-form" so completely as he thought. Nor is mankind, as he imagined, going to find its ultimate salvation on the musical-dramatic stage. We have often had to remark on the over-emphasis he laid upon the stage scene and all its fittings. The modern world is undoubtedly moving away from him on this side. The present tendency in drama is to diminish, not to increase, the poet's dependence upon the scene-shifter and the machinist—to purge the drama of its grosser substance of bustling action, and make it speak, in a subtler language, to the more spiritual side of us. The day of "the dagger-stroke of conventional drama" has gone; "it is far away from bloodshed, battle-cry, and sword-thrust," says Maeterlinck finely, "that



the lives of most of us flow on, and men's tears are silent to-day, and invisible, and almost spiritual.” Already we have come to look upon much of the Wagnerian apparatus as antiquated lumber—the magic, the sorcery, the occult powers in phenomena, and all the rest of it ; and we are inclined to regard with suspicion an art that depends for so much of its effect on the glamour of the stage—to ask whether great art should need to come so perilously close to mere theatrical trickery, as, for example, in the darkening of the stage in *Parsifal* in order to show up the intense illumination of the Grail. Fortunately Wagner's art is, on the whole, great enough and strong enough to survive embarrassing questions of this kind. A refined dramatic taste may object to the strong admixture of the theatrical in the art ; but on reflection it generally becomes certain that the structure would still hold together even if the theatricalism were purged out of it—as in the tedious and puerile scheme of the *Tannhäuser* Bacchanale. But when all is said and done, Wagner remains unique and unapproachable. No one after him has been big enough to wear his mantle ; and the best musicians of the present day work on non-

dramatic lines. Just as he saved music by drawing it from the symphonic into the dramatic channel, so the men of our day have given it renewed life by rescuing it from the bondage of the stage and blending it in a new way with poetry by means of the symphonic poem. What will come after this, no man can say. It may be that another Wagner will come, abjuring the old romantic apparatus, and singing of contemporary life with all its wonderful complexity. If he can do this, and do it with something like Wagner's grandeur and beauty, the world will again have a form of art worthy to stand with the Bach fugue, the Beethoven symphony, the Wagnerian opera, and the Strauss symphonic poem. But there is no such man on the horizon as yet.

## CHAPTER XI

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

THE Wagner literature is enormous—remarkable indeed more for quantity than for quality. In Germany the standard life is C. F. Glasenapp's *Richard Wagner's Leben und Wirken*, a somewhat dull compilation, planned on the huge lines that German biographers so greatly affect, but a product of untiring research, and thus invaluable to the student in spite of all its demerits. Briefer and brighter are the *Richard Wagner, sein Leben und seine Werke* of Wilhelm Tappert, the *Richard Wagner, eine Skizze seines Lebens und Wirkens* of Muncker, the *Richard Wagner* of R. Pohl (*Sammlung musikalischer Vorträge*, vol. v.), and the *Richard Wagner, sein Leben und Schaffen* of Ludwig Nohl. In the *Richard Wagner* of Mr. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a Germanised Englishman, the illustrations are of more durable interest than the text. It is the work of a man of wide and varied culture, but its attitude of hopelessly uncritical Wagner-worship deprives it of any real value. It contains, however, some good

summaries of Wagner's theories, and, on the principle that of two evils it is better to choose the lesser, the reader may prefer reading these to wading through Wagner in the original. Some years previously to the publication of this large and handsome volume, Mr. Chamberlain had produced a much smaller treatise—*Das Drama Richard Wagner's*—that also may be found useful by those who wish a statement of Wagner's theories, with criticism solely from the partisan standpoint. Ludwig Nohl's *Gluck und Wagner: Ueber die Entwicklung des Musikdramas*, and his *Beethoven, Liszt, Wagner*, are also partisan; a scholarly counterblast may be found in C. H. Bitter's *Die Reform der Oper durch Gluck, und Richard Wagner's Kunstwerk der Zukunft*. The cultured non-Wagnerian attitude is seen again in the *Musikdrama oder Oper?* of Emil Naumann. The views of a good modern critic may be seen in Arthur Seidl's *Wagnerianer* (vol. i., *Richard Wagner-Credo*; vol. ii., *Von Palestrina zu Wagner*; vol. iii., *Die Wagner-Nachfolge im Musikdrama*).

The German periodical *Die Musik* has quite recently devoted three whole numbers to Wagner—those of February 1902, July-August 1902, and May 1903.

In English the Wagner literature is com-

paratively small, but quite good. Some of the pioneer treatises, such as Hueffer's *Richard Wagner and the Music of the Future*, and Edward Dannreuther's *Richard Wagner, his Tendencies and Theories*, still keep their place. Mr. Dannreuther's little treatise has within the last few months been brought up to date and re-issued by Messrs. Augener & Co. The volume on Wagner by Hueffer (1883), in the "Great Musician" series, was useful at the time it was written, when Englishmen had little knowledge of Wagner, but is now superseded by the fuller works of recent years. But of all works in English on the subject, by far the best is the *Wagner and his Works* of the American critic, Mr. Henry T. Finck. Published so far back as 1893, it is still easily first in virtue of its completeness, its thorough knowledge and understanding of Wagner, its bright and easy narration of the man's life, its treatment of the prose works as well as the music, its liberal use of Wagner's correspondence to throw light on his life and his art. Mr. Finck's book, indeed, is the most readable and best all-round treatise on Wagner in any language. Great charm and sound scholarship characterise the little volume of *Studies in the Wagnerian Drama* by Mr. H. E. Krehbiel.

Mr. Ashton Ellis's *1849: A Vindication*, deals with Wagner's conduct during the Revolution. The present writer's *Study of Wagner* (1899) is not biographical, but critical—at all events in intention—and deals with the whole Wagner, the historian, the publicist, the æsthetician, the sociologist, the philosopher, as well as the musician and the dramatist.

On the whole, English readers have quite enough Wagner material to serve all practical purposes. The large treatise of Mr. Chamberlain has been translated into English. Mr. Gustav Kobbé's *Wagner's Life and Works* is worth the student's attention, and the translated work of M. A. Lavignac—*The Music Dramas of Richard Wagner*—is a reliable piece of work. Glase-napp's big biography is being brought out in a translation by Mr. Ashton Ellis, who has also done excellent service by translating the ten volumes of Wagner's prose works. Unfortunately Mr. Ellis, by long association with German prose, has acquired habits of expression that are decidedly Teutonic, and that make the reading of his translations of Wagner somewhat of a trial to any one with a literary palate. Some one might now do the student a real service by translating Mr. Ellis into English.

Of his translation of Glasenapp's *Life*, three volumes have so far appeared, taking us to 1853. As Mr. Ellis blends a good deal of his own with Glasenapp—there being 100 pages of Glasenapp to 400 pages of Ellis in vol. iii.—some of us are likely to feel old age creeping on before the publication is completed.

Wagner's letters are indispensable to the student. Five collections of these are published in English—those to Uhlig, Fischer, and Heine, those to Liszt, those to Roeckel, those to Otto Wesendonk, and those to Heckel. In the *Deutsche Rundschau* of 1887 some interesting letters to Frau Wille were published, which have since been reprinted in book form; and there has just appeared a volume of letters to Frau Wesendonk—*Richard Wagner an Mathilde Wesendonk, Tagebuchblätter und Briefe*, 1853–1871—that is of the highest interest. Some letters to Baroness Malwida von Meysenbug may be seen in *Cosmopolis* of August 1896. These duplicate in many cases those to Frau Wesendonk, written at the same time.

Ferdinand Praeger's *Wagner as I Knew Him* is interesting, but is under the strongest suspicion of being in great part pure romance.

The reader will, of course, want to consult

writers who take the view that Wagner was a profound thinker and a serviceable moralist as well as a great musician. These may turn to *The Ring of the Nibelung: an interpretation embodying Wagner's own explanations*, by Mrs. A. L. Cleather and Mr. Basil Crump, and to two books by Mr. David Irvine—*Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung and the Conditions of Ideal Manhood*, and *A Wagnerian's Midsummer Madness*. Mr. Bernard Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite* stands in a class by itself.

The French literature on the subject varies greatly in quality. One of the very earliest French books on Wagner—A. de Gasperini's *Richard Wagner: la nouvelle Allemagne musicale*, remains one of the best; but as it was published in 1866 it necessarily deals with only half of Wagner's career. The big book of Adolphe Jullien—*Richard Wagner, sa vie et ses œuvres*—is interesting as showing how Wagner appealed in the 'eighties to the eyes of cultivated Frenchmen who had not quite succumbed to the magic of the master; but it is not of final value. Jullien was not thoroughly acquainted with his subject, and took a great many things on faith. The *Richard Wagner jugé en France* of Georges Servières is a careful and solid history of the various



attitudes of the French public towards Wagner and his music, down to 1886. J. G. Freson's *L'Esthétique de Richard Wagner* is a useful piece of exposition of the Wagnerian theories, but not sufficiently critical. Of a higher order is Georges Noufflard's *Richard Wagner d'après lui-même*. Interesting discussions of Wagner by men who approach him more from the literary than from the technical musical side will be found in Henri Lichtenberger's *Richard Wagner, poète et penseur*, Catulle Mendes' *Richard Wagner*, and Teodor de Wyzéwa's *Beethoven et Wagner*. Edouard Schuré's *Le Drame musical* is the adoring work of a congenital mystagogue; an analysis of music and poetry from the opposite standpoint may be had in *La musique et le drame* of Charles Beauquier. Albert Lavignac's *Le voyage artistique à Bayreuth* is a very useful volume, containing serviceable information about Bayreuth, a biography of Wagner, an analysis of his works, &c. Henri Coutagne's *Les drames musicaux de Richard Wagner* has the light touch and the sureness of good French criticism. E. de Bricqueville's *L'Opéra de l'avenir dans le passé* brings into the light of day the attempts of previous opera-composers to find a compromise between poetry and music.

There are, of course, innumerable detached articles upon Wagner, and a quantity of "Guides" to all his operas, in English, French, and German.

There is an excellent series by the Belgian musician Maurice Kufferath (pub. by Fischbacher, Paris) under the title of *Le théâtre de R. Wagner*. In English, and in a smaller but very concise way, much the same has been done by Wakeling Dry in his *Nights at the Opera* (The De la More Press), of which the first six little volumes deal with *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *The Ring* (in two books), *Tristan and Isolde*, and *The Mastersingers*. For a brief synopsis of the dramas, with fairly exhaustive musical examples, the little books of Albert Heintz (Novello) are among the best of their kind.

Wagner's own Prose Works, in ten volumes, and the English translation of them, have already been mentioned. Other writings of his appear in volumes entitled respectively *Entwürfe*, *Gedanken*, *Fragmenten*, and *Nachgelassene Schriften und Dichtungen*. The *Jesus von Nazareth* has also been published separately.

An autobiography exists, but has not yet been given to the world.

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